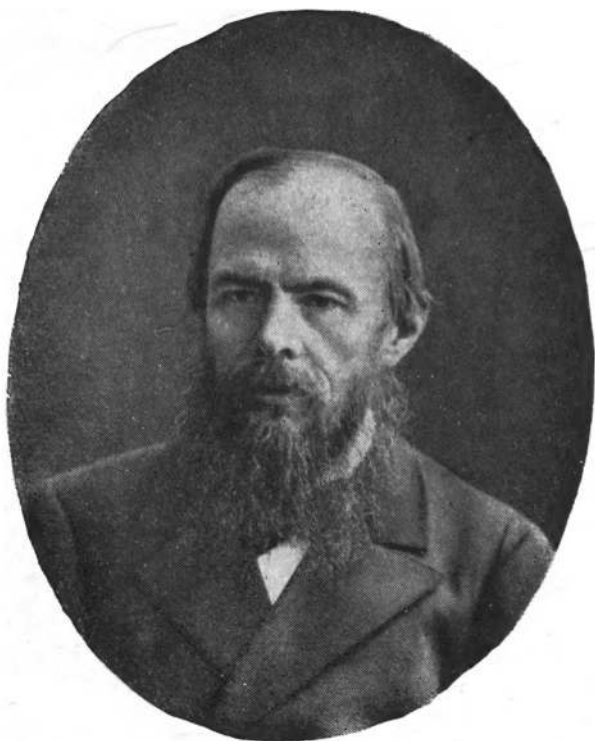


FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY



MY UNCLE'S DREAM





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ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ

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FYODOR DOSTOYEVSKY

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MY UNCLE'S DREAM

CHAPTER I

Marya Alexandrovna Moskaleva is, of course, the first lady in Mordasov—as to that there is no doubt at all. She behaves as if she had no need of anyone, and as if, on the contrary, she knew that everyone needed her. It is true hardly anyone likes her, and there are many who even heartily detest her; but everyone fears her, and that is all she requires. The very fact of such a requirement is the sign of a superior nature. How is it, for example, that Marya Alexandrovna, who adores gossip and cannot sleep if she has heard nothing new during the day, how is it that, despite this, she knows how to behave so that no one would dream, to look at her, that this distinguished lady is the greatest gossip in the world, or, at any rate, in Mordasov? On the contrary one would expect gossip to vanish in her presence, gossips to blush and tremble like boys before the schoolmaster, and conversation to turn only upon the most lofty matters. She knows such important and scandalous things about certain persons in Mordasov that, were she to repeat them at a suitable moment and with that verisimilitude of which she is a past-master, there would be an earthquake in Mordasov as bad as the one in Lisbon. She is, however, excessively reticent about these secrets, only divulging them in the most extreme cases, and then only to her very closest friends. All she does is to alarm, to hint that she knows something, preferring to maintain a lady or gentleman in a state of continual terror, rather than to strike outright. There's a mind for you, there's strategy! Marya Alexan-

drovna has always been distinguished among us for her irreproachable *comme il faut*, which everyone tries to imitate. Indeed, when it comes to *comme il faut*, not a single lady in Mordasov can be compared with her. She can slay, torture, destroy a rival with a single word, as we can testify ourselves; and at the same time seem not to have noticed uttering this word. Such a trait is well known to be a mark of the highest social rank. Altogether, in tricks of this sort, she outwits Pinetti himself. Her connections are vast. Many who visit Mordasov go away enraptured with her reception of them, and even keep up correspondence with her subsequently. One of these actually wrote a poem to her which Marya Alexandrovna proudly exhibited to everyone. A literary visitor dedicated a novel to her and read it aloud at one of her parties, where it produced a most agreeable impression. A German scientist, who came from Karlsruhe with the express purpose of investigating a special kind of horned caterpillar which flourishes in our gubernia, and wrote four volumes *in quarto* about this worm, was so charmed with Marya Alexandrovna's hospitality and courtesy that to this day he maintains a respectful, improving correspondence with her all the way from Karlsruhe. Marya Alexandrovna has even been compared to Napoleon. By her enemies naturally, and more for the sake of caricature than of truth. While, however, thoroughly admitting this comparison to be bizarre, I would venture to put an innocent question: kindly tell me why Napoleon grew dizzy at last, when he had climbed too high? Defenders of the old dynasty ascribe this to the fact that Napoleon, far from being of royal descent was not even a gentleman, and naturally, when finding himself in such a high position, could not forget his humble beginnings. Despite the obvious ingenuity of this supposition, reminiscent as it is of the most brilliant times of the old French court, I would venture to add for my own part: how is it that nothing could ever make Marya Alexan-

drovna dizzy, that she will always be the first lady in Mordasov? There have been, for instance, cases when everyone said: "What will Marya Alexandrovna do in such trying circumstances?" But the trying circumstances arose, passed, and nothing happened. Everything remained as before, and even better. For example, everyone will remember how her husband, Afanasy Matveich, lost his post, owing to the wrath his inefficiency and feeble wits aroused in a visiting inspector. Everyone thought Marya Alexandrovna would lose heart, abase herself, entreat, beg, in a word, show that she was beaten. But nothing of the sort. Marya Alexandrovna understood that it would be useless to beg, and managed her affairs in such a way that she retained every bit of her influence in society, and her house continues to be considered the first house in Mordasov. Anna Nikolayevna Antipova, the attorney's wife, a sworn foe of Marya Alexandrovna, though outwardly her friend, had already begun to crow from the house-tops. But when people saw how difficult it was to shake Marya Alexandrovna, they realized that her roots had struck much deeper than they had supposed.

Since we have mentioned him, we may as well say a few words about Afanasy Matveich, Marya Alexandrovna's husband. In the first place he is an extremely presentable man, and what's more, a person of strict morals, though at critical moments apt to lose his head, and stare like a booby. He is remarkably dignified, especially at name-day dinners, in his white cravat. But all this dignity and presentableness only lasts till he opens his mouth. And then, if you will pardon me for the expression, he is really revolting. He is absolutely unworthy of belonging to Marya Alexandrovna. That is the universal opinion. He only kept his post thanks to his wife's brilliant gifts. I always say he should long ago have been set in the middle of a vegetable plot to scare the sparrows. There, and there only could he have been of real, indubitable use to his

countrymen. And so Marya Alexandrovna did very well in sending Afanasy Matveich to a village a mile or two out of Mordasov, where she had a hundred and twenty serfs—her only means, be it said, of maintaining the honour of her house so worthily. Everyone knew that she had only kept Afanasy Matveich at her side because he had a government post and received a salary, not to mention certain other sources of income. When he ceased to receive his salary *et cetera*, he was immediately banished as unworthy and completely useless. And everyone praised Marya Alexandrovna for her clear judgement and determination. Afanasy Matveich lives in clover in the country. I visited him once and spent a whole hour there quite agreeably. He tries on his white cravats continually and polishes his own boots, not because he has to, but from sheer love of the occupation, and because he likes his boots to shine. He drinks tea three times a day, is very fond of going to the bath, and—is content.

Everyone remembers the disgraceful affair which broke out among us, a year and a half ago, in connection with Zenaida Afanasyevna, the only daughter of Marya Alexandrovna and Afanasy Matveich. Zenaida is unquestionably a beauty, and exceedingly well-bred, but she is twenty-three and not yet married. That Zenaida is still unmarried is largely owing to dark rumours of certain strange relations between her and the local school teacher a year and a half ago—rumours which have not yet died down. People still speak of a love-letter in Zena's hand which was said to have made the rounds in Mordasov. But did anyone actually see this letter? Tell me that. If it made the rounds, then what became of it? Everyone heard of it, but nobody ever saw it. I, at any rate, never met anyone who saw this letter with his own eyes. If you hint at this letter to Marya Alexandrovna, she simply doesn't know what you're talking about. Assuming, now, that there really was something and that Zena did write a letter (and I am inclined

to suppose that she did), what extraordinary skill was displayed by Marya Alexandrovna! How the awkward scandalous affair was hushed up, suppressed! Not a trace, not a hint! Marya Alexandrovna never pays the slightest attention to this scurrilous slander any more. And yet, God alone knows how she worked to preserve unstained the honour of her only daughter! And if Zena is not married, it is not to be wondered at—after all what suitors have we here? Zena ought to marry a prince of the blood. Was there ever before such a beauty! True, she is proud, inordinately proud. They say Mozglyakov aspires to her hand but it is unlikely that it will come to a wedding. For who is Mozglyakov? True, he's young, not bad-looking, a dandy, has a hundred and fifty unencumbered serfs, and is from Petersburg. But then he's a bit daft, a chatterbox, a scatter-brain, always full of new-fangled ideas. And what's a hundred and fifty serfs, especially when their owner goes in for new-fangled ideas! No, no! There will be no wedding!

All that the gentle reader has just read was written by me five months ago, from sheer admiration. I freely admit that I am somewhat partial to Marya Alexandrovna. I intended to write a kind of paean of praise to that splendid lady, in the form of a facetious letter to a friend, on the lines of the letters in *The Northern Bee* and other publications, in those good old days which, thank God, will never come back. But since I have no such friend and at the same time a certain inherent literary timidity, my essay has remained in the drawer of my desk, as a kind of first attempt at writing, and in memory of peaceful entertainment in hours of happy leisure. Five months passed—and suddenly an extraordinary occurrence took place in Mordasov—early one morning Count K. arrived and stayed in the house of Marya Alexandrovna. The consequences of this visit were innumerable. The Count only stayed in Mordasov three days, but those three days left behind them fatal

and ineradicable memories. I will go further—the Count produced something like a revolution in our town. The narrative of this revolution undoubtedly constitutes one of the most significant pages in the annals of Mordasov. And this page I resolved, at last, after certain hesitations, to make the object of a literary work, to be offered to the judgement of the esteemed public. My novel contains the full and remarkable tale of the rise, the glory, and the tragic fall of Marya Alexandrovna and her entire household. A topic at once worthy and, for a writer, tempting. It will be necessary first to explain what is so remarkable in the fact of the Count coming to our town and staying with Marya Alexandrovna—and this in its turn necessitates giving a few words about Count K. himself. For the biography of this person is absolutely essential to the further course of our narrative. And so I will begin.

CHAPTER II

I will begin with the statement that Count K. was by no means an old man, and yet, when one looked at him one could not avoid the reflection that he was on the point of dissolution, so decrepit, or rather, so moth-eaten, did he seem. Reports of the most singular character were spread about this Count in Mordasov. Some even declared that the old man was mad. It struck everyone as particularly strange that the owner of four thousand serfs, the scion of a famous line, who could, if he liked, have exercised considerable influence in the gubernia, should live the life of a hermit on his splendid estate. There were many who had known the Count six or seven years before, during his residence in Mordasov, and declared that at that time he could not endure solitude and was like anything but a hermit.

However, the following is all the reliable information I could gather about him:

At one time, in the years of his youth, a very long time ago, by the way, the Count had made a brilliant entry into life; giving himself up to enjoyment and love-making, he spent more than one fortune in foreign countries, sang drawing-room ballads, and perpetrated puns, though never distinguishing himself by brilliant mental capacities. He laid waste to his fortune as a matter of course, and found himself almost penniless in his old age. Somebody advised him to return to his estate, which was in danger of being put up to auction. He did so, taking Mordasov on his way, where he stayed exactly six months. Life in the gubernia was very much to his taste and in these six months he spent all that remained to him, down to the last farthing, continuing his dissipated courses and forming intimacies of various kinds with the ladies of the gubernia. He was the most good-natured of men, though of course he was not free from certain aristocratic vices. But since such vices are considered to be the privilege of high society in Mordasov, far from causing public indignation, they produced quite an effect. The ladies in particular were in constant ecstasies over their dear guest. Many curious memories have remained. It was said, among other things, that the Count spent more than half the day over his toilet and seemed to be composed of separate fragments. Nobody knew when and where he had broken up like that. He wore a wig, and his moustache, his whiskers, and even his "imperial," were all to the last hair false, and all of a raven hue. He powdered and rouged himself every day. It was asserted that he smoothed out the wrinkles on his face with the aid of springs, and that these springs were ingeniously concealed beneath his hair. It was further asserted that he wore a corset, having lost one of his ribs while making an awkward jump out of the window during some amorous escapade in Italy. He was lame in his left

foot, which people declared to be artificial, his own having been damaged during some other escapade, in Paris; they said too that the new foot was a very wonderful one, made of cork. But then what will people not say? His right eye was certainly a glass one, though most skilfully made. His teeth, too, were artificial. He washed himself by the hour in all sorts of patent lotions, and was always scented and anointed. It was also remembered that even then the Count had begun to show obvious signs of being in his dotage and had become intolerably garrulous. It looked as if his career were over. It was common knowledge that he had not a farthing left. And just then, one of his nearest female relatives, a decrepit old woman who had taken up her residence permanently in Paris, as to whom he could never possibly have had expectations, suddenly died, after burying, exactly a month before, her legitimate heir. The Count quite unexpectedly became her next-of-kin. He found himself sole owner of four thousand serfs on a splendid estate, precisely fifty miles from Mordasov. He set off immediately for Petersburg to wind up his affairs. Our ladies clubbed together to give the departing guest a splendid banquet. It was remembered that the Count was delightfully gay at this last dinner, punning, joking, relating all sorts of remarkable stories, promising to go to Dukhanovo (his newly acquired estate) as soon as possible, and vowing that as soon as he got back there would be an uninterrupted series of entertainments, picnics, balls, and firework displays. The ladies talked about these promised treats a whole year after his departure, and waited with feverish impatience for the return of their dear old friend. In the meantime, they got up excursions to Dukhanovo, where there was an old-fashioned mansion and a garden with acacias clipped to resemble lions, dainty arbours, pavilions, *mon plaisirs*, artificial hills, lakes over which glided boats with figure-heads of Turks playing on reeds, and goodness knows what more.

At last the Count returned, to the universal astonishment and disappointment not even coming to Mordasov, but settling down in Dukhanovo, where he lived the life of a hermit. Strange rumours got about, and from that period the Count's history becomes obscure and legendary. In the first place it was said that he had had no luck in Petersburg, that certain of his relatives, his future heirs, no doubt fearing that he would lay waste to this fortune, too, wanted to have the Count placed under a guardian, on the plea that he was feeble-minded. Some people added that attempts had actually been made to have him confined in an asylum, but that one of his relatives, a very important person, had stood up for him, reminding the others in the most persuasive manner that the poor Count was half-dead already, and practically held together by artificial means, and that he would probably be quite dead very soon, so that the estate would fall to them without the need of having recourse to a lunatic asylum. I repeat: what will not people say, especially in our Mordasov? All this, as has been said, fairly terrified the Count, so that his character changed completely and he became a hermit. Certain Mordasov notabilities went to pay him congratulatory visits, out of sheer curiosity, but they were either not received, or received in a very strange manner. The Count did not even recognize his former acquaintances. It was asserted that he did not wish to recognize them.

The Governor himself, who went to call on him, returned with the news that in his opinion the Count really was slightly touched, and thereafter always pulled a wry face when reminded of his visit to Dukhanovo. The ladies were loud in their indignation. At last one important fact was established, namely that the Count was under the thumb of a certain Stepanida Matveyevna (and who she was God alone knew!) who had accompanied him from Petersburg, and was a fat, elderly woman, who went about in print dresses with a bunch of keys in her hand; that the Count

obeyed her implicitly, like a child, and never ventured to move without her permission. That she washed him with her own hands, petted and spoiled him like a child, and that finally it was she who kept all visitors away from him, especially relatives, who had begun to make occasional visits to Dukhanovo by way of reconnoitre. Many surmises as to this mysterious connection were made in Mordasov, especially by the ladies. It was also said that Stepanida Matveyevna managed the Count's entire estate, with unlimited and arbitrary powers; that she dismissed stewards, bailiffs, and servants, and collected dues herself. But that she was a good manager, so that the peasants blessed their stars. As for the Count, it was discovered that he spent almost the whole day on his toilet, trying on wigs and frock-coats; that the rest of the time he passed with Stepanida Matveyevna, playing Beggar My Neighbour with her, telling fortunes by the cards, and occasionally going out for a ride on his quiet English mare, invariably accompanied by Stepanida Matveyevna in a closed carriage, in case of accident; for the Count, who could hardly sit in his saddle, rode more from ostentation than for any pleasure it gave him. Sometimes he was to be met on foot, in an overcoat and a broad-brimmed straw hat, a pink woman's kerchief round his neck, a monocle in his eye, a basket on his left arm, to hold mushrooms, corn-flowers, and the like; Stepanida Matveyevna was always on his side, and they were followed by two six-foot men-servants, and, in case of accidents, by a carriage. If they were met by a peasant, who would move aside, taking off his cap and bowing low, with the words: "Good day, dear Count, Your Excellency, good day, our Sun!" the Count would immediately turn his lorgnette upon him, bow graciously, and say kindly: "*Bonjour, mon ami, bonjour!*" Many were the rumours of this sort that went the rounds in Mordasov. People could not forget the Count. He lived so near. Judge then of the general astonishment when, one

fine morning, the rumour spread that the Count, that hermit and eccentric, had come to Mordasov of his own free will and was staying with Marya Alexandrovna! All was excitement and confusion. Everyone waited for an explanation, asking one another continually: what does it mean? Some already contemplated calling on Marya Alexandrovna. The Count's visit struck everyone as something quite out of the way. The ladies exchanged notes, paid visits, sent their maids and husbands to reconnoitre. It was considered most peculiar that the Count had put up at Marya Alexandrovna's and nowhere else. No one was more vexed than Anna Nikolayevna Antipova, a very distant relative of the Count's. But the only way to find an answer to all these questions was to go and see Marya Alexandrovna herself, to whose house we also invite the gentle reader to accompany us. True it is only ten a. m. as yet, but I am confident she will not refuse to see her intimate friends. At any rate she will certainly receive us.

CHAPTER III

Ten a. m. We are in the house of Marya Alexandrovna, on Bolshaya Street, in that very room which the hostess, on solemn occasions, calls her salon. Marya Alexandrovna had a boudoir, too. The floor of the salon is brilliantly polished and the wall-paper is in quite good taste. The upholstery of the ponderous furniture is predominantly red in colour. There is a fire-place with a mirror over the mantelpiece, and in front of the mirror a bronze clock complete with cupids in extremely bad taste. In the spaces between the windows are two mirrors, the slip-covers of which have been hastily removed. On the small tables in front of these mirrors are more clocks. Against the back wall stands a fine grand-piano, specially brought here for Zena. Zena is a musician. Beside the lighted hearth stand armchairs in

more or less picturesque disorder. Between two of them is a little table. At the other end of the room is yet another table. This table is covered with a cloth of dazzling whiteness, upon which stands a silver samovar at the boil, and a dainty tea-service. The samovar and the making of the tea are in the charge of a lady who lives with Marya Alexandrovna in the capacity of distant relative, Nastasya Petrovna Zyablova.

A few words as to this lady. She was a widow on the wrong side of thirty, a brunette with a fresh complexion and lovely, dark-brown eyes. By no means bad-looking. She was a merry soul, greatly addicted to laughter, shrewd enough, a gossip, of course, and well able to look after her own little affairs. She had two children, away at school somewhere. She would very much like to marry again. She was thoroughly independent in her manners. Her husband was an officer.

Marya Alexandrovna sat beside the fire, in the best of humours, and a light-green dress, highly becoming to her. She was simply delighted at the visit of the Count, who was at that moment upstairs, attending to his toilet. So delighted was she that she took no trouble to conceal her feelings. In front of her stood a young man in an affected pose, telling her something in animated tones. His eyes showed a desire to please his listeners. He was twenty-five years old. His manners would have been tolerable if he had not fallen so constantly into ecstasies, or made such exaggerated claims to humour and wit. He was very well dressed, fair-haired, not bad-looking. But we have mentioned him before. He is that Monsieur Mozglyakov on whom such high hopes have been placed. In her heart Marya Alexandrovna considered him somewhat empty-headed, but she always gave him a cordial reception. He was the suitor of her daughter, Zena, with whom he was, in his own words, madly in love. He kept turning to Zena, trying to win a smile from her lips by his wit and gaiety.

But Zena treated him with obvious coldness and neglect. At this moment she was standing apart, at the piano, absently turning the leaves of an almanac with her fingertips. She was one of those women who evoke universal, enthusiastic admiration wherever they appear. She was extraordinarily handsome—tall, dark, with marvellous, almost black eyes, slender, but with a glorious, a majestic, bust. Her arms and shoulders were statuesque, her feet alluring, her gait queenly. She was a little pale to-day, but her full, crimson, exquisitely chiselled lips, between which the small even teeth gleamed like a row of pearls, would haunt your dreams for three nights, once you had caught a glimpse of them. Her expression was grave and severe. Her steady glance evidently made Monsieur Mozglyakov feel ill at ease; at all events he seemed to wilt every time he ventured to steal a glance at her. There was a haughty indifference in all her movements. She wore a simple white muslin dress. White suited her to a marvel, but then everything suited her. On one of her fingers was a ring enclosing a tress of somebody's hair; judging by the colour it was not her Mamma's. Mozglyakov had never ventured to ask her whose it was. On this particular morning Zena seemed to be even more silent than usual, in fact melancholy, as if plunged in care. But Marya Alexandrovna was ready to chatter incessantly, though every now and then stealing a suspicious glance at her daughter; this however was done furtively, as if she, too, were afraid of her.

"I'm so glad, so glad, Pavel Alexandrovich!" she twittered, "I'm ready to tell about it all out of the window, to all and sundry. I do not speak of the charming surprise you have given us—me and Zena—by coming two weeks before you promised; that goes without saying! I'm so glad you brought that dear Count here! You cannot imagine how I love the charming old man! No, you couldn't understand a thing like that. You young people cannot

understand enthusiasm like mine, try as I may to make you. You can have no idea what he meant to me in the old days, six years ago—remember, Zena? Oh, but I forgot, you were staying with your aunt then. . . . You'll hardly believe me, Pavel Alexandrovich, I was his guide, his sister, his mother. He obeyed me like a child. There was something naïve, tender, lofty in our relations; there was something even pastoral. I simply don't know what to call it. That's why he now remembers my house alone with gratitude, *ce pauvre prince!* You probably have no idea, Pavel Alexandrovich, what you may have saved him from by bringing him to me? I have been thinking of him with an aching heart all these six years. You will scarcely believe me—I actually dreamed of him. They say that awful woman has bewitched him, ruined him. But at last you have torn him out of her clutches! Ah, but the opportunity must be used to deliver him altogether! Tell me once more how you managed it all. Describe to me, in the utmost detail, your meeting with him. When you first told me, in my excitement I only noticed the main thing, and yet it is the details which compose as it were the quintessence of a thing. I adore details, even in the most important matters I notice details first . . . and . . . while he's still dressing . . . you can. . . ."

"Why, it was all just as I told you, Marya Alexandrovna," Mozglyakov said, interrupting her eagerly. He was quite willing to tell his story a dozen times, if required, for it afforded him the utmost enjoyment. "I travelled all night, and of course did not sleep a wink—you may imagine how I hurried," he added, turning to Zena. "In a word, I swore and shouted, and called for horses, I had terrific rows about horses at the posting stations. If it were to be printed it would make a whole poem in the latest style. But that's not the point. At precisely six in the morning I arrive at Igishevo, the last station. Frozen to the marrow, not stopping to get warm, shouting for

horses. Frightening the postmaster's wife, with a baby in arms, probably lost all her milk now. . . . Exquisite sunrise. You know—the rime turns crimson, then silver. Paying not the slightest attention to anything. In a word hurrying like the devil. Taking horses by storm, getting them away from some privy councillor, whom I almost challenge to a duel. They tell me that some Count, using his own horses, stayed the night, and left the station a quarter of an hour ago. I hardly listen, get in, and speed like one possessed. Fet has something of the sort in one of his elegies. Precisely seven miles from the town, just at the turning to the Svetozersk Hermitage, I see something extraordinary has occurred. A huge travelling carriage lies on its side, the coachman and two footmen stand in front of it in perplexity, and from the carriage, turned over on its side, come heart-rending cries and howls. Decide to go on. Lie there on your side! What's it to do with me?

"But humanity which, as Heine says, is always poking its nose into everything, got the upper hand. I stop. I, my Semyon, my coachman (a Russian soul, too) hasten to the rescue, and all six of us at last lift up the carriage, set it on its feet (true it has no feet, it was on runners). Some peasants taking wood to the town helped too, I tip them. 'I wonder if it's that same Count they told me about,' thinks I. I take a look—heavens! It's he himself, Count Gavрила. What a meeting! I shout to him: 'Count! Uncle!' Of course he hardly recognizes me at first. I mean he recognized me almost at once . . . the next minute. I don't mind telling you, though, that he probably still doesn't understand who I am, and seems to take me for some friend and not for a relative. I met him seven years ago in Petersburg. Well of course I was only a little boy at the time. I remembered him, he made an impression on me. But why should he remember me? I introduce myself. He is in ecstasies, embraces me, and all the time shaking with fear and crying, crying, by God—I saw it with my

own eyes. One way and another I at last persuade him to get into my carriage and go to Mordasov, if only for one day, to restore his spirits and rest. He agrees without a murmur . . . tells me he had been going to the Svetozersk hermitage to see Father Missail, whom he reveres and respects; that Stepanida Matveyevna—we relatives have all heard of Stepanida Matveyevna, she drove me out of Dukhanovo only last year with a broom—that this Stepanida Matveyevna got a letter telling her that one of her relatives in Moscow was at the last gasp—her father, or her daughter, one or the other, I neither know nor care. Perhaps it was her father *and* her daughter; perhaps some nephew or other, working in some tavern, was thrown in as a make-weight. . . . In a word she was so upset that she decided to part with her Count for ten days or so, and rushed to the capital, to adorn it by her presence. The Count waited one day and another day, tried on his wigs, anointed himself, dyed his hair, consulted the cards (or perhaps it was coffee-grounds), but in the end found he couldn't get on without Stepanida Matveyevna. So he ordered horses and set off for Svetozersk Hermitage. One of the servants, fearing the invisible Stepanida Matveyevna, ventured to make objections, but the Count stuck to his guns. Started yesterday after dinner, spent the night in Igishevo, left the station at dawn, and just at the turning which was to take him to Father Missail almost fell, carriage and all, into the gully. I rescue him, persuade him to come to the house of our mutual friend, the esteemed Marya Alexandrovna. He says you are the most charming lady he has ever known and here we are, and now the Count is setting his toilet to rights upstairs, with the help of his valet, whom he did not fail to take with him, and whom he never in any circumstances fails to take with him, being ready to die rather than appear before ladies without certain prep-

arations, or, rather, restorations—and that's the whole story. *Eine allerliebste Geschichte!*"

"What a humorist he is, Zena!" cries Marya Alexandrovna after hearing him out. "How nicely he tells it. But listen, Paul, one more question! Tell me exactly what relation you are to the Count? I see you call him Uncle?"

"I don't know, Marya Alexandrovna—I really don't know what relation I am to him. Seven times removed I think—and even then I'm not quite sure about it. It's not my fault, it's all the fault of Aunt Aglaya Mikhailovna. You see Aunt Aglaya Mikhailovna has nothing to do but count her relatives on her fingers. It was she who egged me on to visit him last year at Dukhanovo. Why didn't she go herself? I call him Uncle for no special reason, and he answers. That's the whole of our kinship, so far, anyhow...."

"Well, I shall always say that God alone could have put it into your head to bring him straight to me. I tremble when I think how it would have been with him, poor dear, if he got into anyone else's home! Why, the people here would have seized him, torn him to pieces, devoured him! They would have rushed at him as if he were a gold mine or something, they might even have robbed him. You can have no idea of the greedy, base, treacherous creatures here, Pavel Alexandrovich!"

"For goodness' sake! Who else could he be brought to, but you? How funny you are, Marya Alexandrovna!" put in Anastasya Petrovna, the widow engaged in pouring out tea. "You didn't expect him to take the Count to Anna Nikolayevna, did you?"

"But why is he such a long time? It's quite odd," said Marya Alexandrovna, rising impatiently from her chair.

"Uncle, you mean? Oh, he'll probably take another five hours to dress himself. And since he has absolutely no memory, he may even have forgotten that he is staying

with you. He's an awfully queer man, you know, Marya Alexandrovna."

"Oh, stop that, please, don't talk such nonsense!"

"It isn't nonsense, Marya Alexandrovna, it's the sober truth. Why he's not a man, he's just a jumble of different parts. You saw him six years ago, but I saw him only an hour ago. He ought to have been buried long before this. He's a living corpse. A ghost! They simply forgot to bury him. His eyes are false, his legs are of cork, he's all on springs, and he speaks on springs."

"Heavens, what a feather-brain you are!" cried Marya Alexandrovna, assuming a severe air. "You ought to be ashamed—a young man, a relative—to talk like that about such a venerable old man! Not to mention his boundless kindness," and her voice acquired a touching tenderness. "Remember he is a remainder, as it were, a fragment of our aristocracy. My friend, *mon ami*! I know you only run on like that because of those new ideas you are always talking about. But, good heavens, I myself cherish those new ideas! I know the basis of your opinions is noble and honourable. I feel that there is even something lofty in these new ideas. But all this does not prevent me from seeing the real, the so-to-say practical aspect of things. I have lived in society, I have seen more of life than you have and, finally, I am a mother, and you are still young. He is an old man and therefore ridiculous in your eyes. Besides, last year you actually said you intended to set your peasants free, you felt you must do something for the age, and all because you had been reading too much of that Shakespeare of yours! Believe me, Pavel Alexandrovich, your Shakespeare has outlived his age long long ago and if he were to come back to life, he would not be able, for all his great mind, to understand a single feature of our life. If there is anything chivalrous and dignified left in our modern society, it is precisely among the upper classes. It is there that one must look for

it. A count is a count everywhere, a count will behave in a hut just as he would in a palace. And though our Natalya Dmitriyevna's husband has built himself almost a palace, he is still nothing but Natalya Dmitriyevna's husband. And Natalya Dmitriyevna herself can put on fifty crinolines, but she will still be the old Natalya Dmitriyevna, and nothing more. You yourself are to a certain extent a representative of the upper classes, for you come from them. I, too, consider myself no alien to them, and it's an ill bird that fouls its own nest! But after all you will come to these conclusions yourself without my teaching you, *mon cher Paul*, and will forget your Shakespeare, I assure you! I feel that even now you are not sincere, and are merely following the fashion. But how I run on! You stay here, *mon cher Paul*, and I'll go upstairs and see what the Count is doing. Perhaps he needs something, and those servants of mine, you know. . . ."

And Marya Alexandrovna hastened out of the room at the remembrance of those servants of hers.

"Marya Alexandrovna seems to be very glad the Count did not fall into the hands of that stuck-up Anna Nikolayevna. And after Anna Nikolayevna telling everyone she was related to him! I should think she must be fairly bursting with rage!" remarked Nastasya Petrovna, but as no one answered her, she glanced at Zena, took the hint, and went out of the room as if she had something to do. She instantly rewarded herself, however, by standing outside the door and listening.

Pavel Alexandrovich at once turned towards Zena. He was in a state of profound agitation; his voice trembled.

"Zenaida Afanasyevna, you're not angry with me, are you?" he said with a timid, imploring air.

"With you? What for?" said Zena. She flushed slightly, and raised her marvellous eyes to him.

"For coming so soon, Zenaida Alexandrovna! I couldn't stand it, I couldn't wait another two weeks. . . . You haunt-

ed my very dreams! I rushed back to know my fate. . . . But you frown, you are angry! Am I not to know anything definite even now?"

It was true—Zena was frowning.

"I was expecting you to mention this," she replied, once more lowering her eyes; her voice was firm and severe, but a note of vexation could have been discerned in it. "And since this expectation has been exceedingly trying for me, the sooner it comes to an end, the better. You again demand, I mean, ask, for an answer. Then allow me to give you the same answer again, for it is the same now as it was before—wait. I repeat—I have not yet made up my mind and cannot promise to be your wife. You cannot enforce such a demand, Pavel Alexandrovich. But to console you I will add that I will not yet give you a final refusal. And mark this: if I now encourage you to hope for a favourable decision, it is simply because I feel for your impatience and anxiety. I repeat that I wish to remain perfectly free to decide, and if, finally, I tell you that I will never marry you, you in your turn have no right to blame me for encouraging you to hope. Bear that in mind!"

"Then what—what?" cried Mozglyakov plaintively. "Can it be encouragement? May I extract a grain of hope from your words, Zenaïda Afanasyevna?"

"Bear in mind what I have told you and extract whatever you like. That is your business. I shall not add another word. I do not refuse you as yet. I only say—wait. But I repeat I maintain my right to refuse you if I like. I will say one more thing, Pavel Alexandrovich, if you have come back before the expiration of the term set for an answer in order to act in some round-about way, or hoping for some outside protection (Mamma's, let us say), you are quite out in your reckoning. In that case I should refuse you outright—d'you hear me? And now, enough,

and kindly not another word of this to me till the time comes."

This speech was delivered in firm, cold tones without the slightest hesitation, as if it had been got by heart. Monsieur Paul felt he had been put in his place. Just then Marya Alexandrovna came back, followed almost immediately by Madame Zyablova.

"I think he'll be here in a minute, Zena! Anastasya Petrovna, make fresh tea at once!"

Marya Alexandrovna was quite flustered.

"Anna Nikolayevna has already sent to find out what's going on. Her Anyutka has been in the kitchen, asking questions. Oh, how furious she'll be now!" contributed Nastasya Petrovna, hastening towards the samovar.

"What's that to do with me?" said Marya Alexandrovna over her shoulder to Madame Zyablova. "As if I care what your Anna Nikolayevna thinks! Believe me I shall not send anyone to her kitchen. And I'm surprised, I am really, that you should consider me the enemy of that poor Anna Nikolayevna—and not only you, the whole town seems to think so. I appeal to *you*, Pavel Alexandrovich. You know us both—now why on earth should I be her enemy? To gain priority? But I am quite indifferent to it. Let her take the first place, let her, I say! I would be the first to go to her and congratulate her on her priority. Besides, it's all so unfair! I stand up for her, it is my duty to stand up for her. People slander her. What makes you all attack her? She's young and fond of dressing—is that why? In my opinion it's better to go in for dressing than some other things, like Natalya Dmitriyevna, for instance, who's fond of what cannot be mentioned. Is it because Anna Nikolayevna is always out visiting and can't stay at home? Oh, heavens! She has had no education and naturally it's not easy for her to, say, take up a book, or occupy herself over something for two minutes running. She flirts and makes eyes out of the window to everyone

passing in the street. Then why do people tell her she's pretty, when all she has is a fair complexion, and nothing more? She's ridiculous when she dances—that I grant you. Then why tell her she polks marvellously! She wears impossible caps and hats—but is it her fault if God did not endow her with taste, and made her so credulous? Tell her that the wrapping from a *bonbon* would look nice in her hair, and she'll pin one there! She's a gossip—but that's the habit here. Who doesn't gossip here? That be-whiskered Sushilov visits her morning, noon and night. Oh, heavens—how can she help it if her husband plays cards till five in the morning? And then look at all the bad examples here! And after all, *perhaps* it's only slander. Anyhow, I shall always stand up for her, always! Oh, heavens, here comes the Count! It's he, it's he! I should know him among a thousand! At last I see you, *mon prince*," cried Marya Alexandrovna and rushed to meet the Count.

CHAPTER IV

At a cursory glance you would by no means take the Count for an old man, and it was only after a closer, more penetrating one that you would see that this was a kind of galvanized corpse. All the means afforded by art had been employed to dress this mummy up as a young man. A remarkable wig, whiskers, a moustache, a pointed beard, all of a splendid black hue, covered half of his face. He was enamelled and rouged with extraordinary skill, and he had scarcely a wrinkle. What had happened to them? Nobody knew. He was dressed in the height of fashion, and looked as if he had just stepped out of a fashion-plate. He wore a cut-away, or something of the sort, I'm sure I don't know what exactly, but it was extremely fashionable and up-to-date, specially made for paying morning visits. Gloves, tie, waistcoat, linen, etc., were dazzlingly

fresh and in the most elegant taste. The Count limped a little, but he did it so skilfully that this, too, seemed to be demanded by fashion. He wore a monocle in one eye, that very eye which was of glass anyhow. He was drenched with scent. When he spoke he drawled out certain words, either from senility, or because all his teeth were artificial, perhaps merely for the sake of effect. He uttered some syllables with extraordinary sweetness, and always stressed the letter *e*. He pronounced "yes," "ye-es," with an ineffably saccharine effect. There was an ease, acquired in the course of his whole life as a dandy, in his manners. But if there really was anything that had survived from that former life of his, it was quite unconscious, a kind of obscure reminiscence, something left over from bygone days now buried in oblivion, which, alas, no cosmetics, corsets, perfumers, and barbers could bring back. And so we shall do better if we admit in advance that the old gentleman, while he might not yet quite have lost his wits, had long ago lost his memory, and was always becoming confused in his speech, repeating himself, sometimes even talking quite wildly. You had to know how to carry on a conversation with him. But Marya Alexandrovna has plenty of self-confidence, and the appearance of the Count threw her into ecstasies.

"But you haven't changed in the least, not in the least!" she exclaimed, seizing the guest by his hands, and seating him in a comfortable armchair. "Sit down, Count, sit down! Six years, six whole years we haven't met, and not a single letter, not a word all this time! Oh, how badly you have treated me, Count! How angry I was with you, *mon cher prince!* But tea—tea! Quick, Nastasya Petrovna—tea!"

"Thanks . . . thanks . . . sorry . . ." lisped the Count. (We forgot to say that he lisped a little, and even this he did as if it were fashionable.) "Sorry! Fancy, last year I absolutely meant to come here," he added, inspecting the

room through his lorgnette. "But they frightened me. They said you had the cholera here...."

"No, Count, there wasn't any cholera," said Marya Alexandrovna.

"There was foot-and-mouth disease, Uncle," put in Mozglyakov, desirous of distinguishing himself. Marya Alexandrovna measured him with a severe glance.

"Well, then, foot-and-mouth disease, or something of that sort. So I stayed at home. And how is your husband, my dear Anna Nikolayevna? Still busy at his attorney's office?"

"No, Count," said Marya Alexandrovna, stammering slightly. "My husband is not the district attorney."

"I bet you Uncle has got mixed up and takes you for Anna Nikolayevna Antipova!" cried the ingenuous Mozglyakov, but checked himself on noting that, even without this elucidation, Marya Alexandrovna seemed to be quite disconcerted.

"Why, yes, yes, Anna Nikolayevna, and, and . . . (I keep forgetting). Why yes, Antipova, of course," said the Count.

"No, Count, you are greatly mistaken," said Marya Alexandrovna with a wry smile. "I'm not Anna Nikolayevna, and I must say I should never have believed you would not recognize me. You surprise me, Count! I'm your old friend, Marya Alexandrovna Moskaleva. Don't you remember Marya Alexandrovna, Count?"

"Marya Alexandrovna! Fancy now! And I was quite sure you were (what's her name)—why yes, Anna Vasilyevna. *C'est délicieux!* So I've come to the wrong place. And I thought you were taking me straight to—er—Anna Matveyevna, my friend. *C'est charmant!* But this often happens to me! I'm always going to the wrong place. But I don't mind, I'm always pleased, whatever happens. So you're not Nastasya Vasilyevna. How interesting—"

"Marya Alexandrovna, Count, Marya Alexandrovna! Oh, how badly you have treated me! To forget your very best friend!"

"Why yes, my best friend . . . *pardon, pardon!*" lisped the Count who seemed unable to take his eyes off Zena.

"And this is my daughter, Zena. You don't know her yet, Count. She wasn't at home when you were here, in the year—remember, Count?"

"So that is your daughter! *Charmante, charmante!*" mumbled the Count looking eagerly at Zena through his lorgnette. "*Mais quelle beauté!*" he whispered, obviously struck.

"Some tea, Count?" said Marya Alexandrovna, drawing the Count's attention to a juvenile footman standing in front of him with a tray in his hands. The Count took the cup and looked at the lad, who had chubby pink cheeks.

"Ah, and is this your son?" he said. "What a nice little boy! I'm sure he is very well behaved."

"But, Count," interrupted Marya Alexandrovna hurriedly. "I heard of your terrible accident. I admit I was almost out of my mind with fright. . . . Are you sure you didn't hurt yourself? You mustn't neglect a thing like that, you know!"

"He threw me out, he did! The coachman threw me out!" exclaimed the Count with remarkable animation. "I thought the end of the world had come, or something of the sort, and I was, I admit, so frightened. . . . God help me, I was frightened out of my wits! I didn't expect it, I did not! I never expected it! And it was all my coachman Feofil's fault. I rely entirely on you, my friend—get to the root of the matter and do what you like. I am convinced he made an attempt on my life."

"Very well, Uncle," replied Pavel Alexandrovich. "I'll do what I can. But look here, Uncle! Why not forgive him for this once, eh? What d'you say to that?"

"Not for the world! I am convinced he made an attempt on my life. He, and that Lavrenty I left behind at home. Fancy—he's got hold of some of those new ideas, you know! There's a kind of nihilism in him. To put it briefly, he's a communist in the full sense of the word. I'm quite afraid of meeting him, now."

"Oh, how true that is, Count!" exclaimed Marya Alexandrovna. "You can't imagine how I myself suffer from those worthless creatures! Fancy—I've just had to dismiss two of my men-servants, and I must admit the new ones are so stupid that I have trouble with them from morning to night. You can't imagine how stupid they are, Count!"

"Why yes, why yes! But I must admit I rather like my servants to be a little stupid," said the Count, who, like all old people, was pleased when his prattle was listened to with obsequious attention. "It suits a footman, somehow. It's quite a virtue in them to be honest and stupid. Of course only in certain cases. It seems to make them more presentable, they get a kind of solemn expression on their faces. In a word it makes them seem well-bred, and breeding is the first thing I demand of a footman. I have a fellow called Terenty, now. You remember, Terenty, my friend, don't you? The moment my eyes fell on him I foretold his destiny—the very first time: 'You shall be a hall-porter!' Phenomenally stupid! A sheep-like expression! But how presentable, how solemn! Such a fresh, pink Adam's apple! And when you put a white tie round his neck, and dress him up in livery, the effect is splendid. I have become sincerely attached to him. Sometimes I look and look at him—you'd think he was meditating on philosophy or something, a regular Kant, or, to be precise—a regular crammed, fat turkey cock. Absolutely *comme il faut* for a servant!"

Marya Alexandrovna, fairly overcome with delight, could not refrain from clapping her hands. Pavel Alexan-

drovich echoed her laughter with all his heart. His uncle amused him enormously. Nastasya Petrovna laughed, too. Even Zena smiled.

"But what humour, what gaiety, what wit you have, Count!" cried Marya Alexandrovna. "What a precious ability to discover the most subtle, the most comic trait! . . . And to disappear from society, to lock yourself up for five whole years! With your talents! You ought to write, Count! You could have been another Fonvisin, a Griboyedov, a Gogol! . . ."

"Why yes, why yes!" said this most complacent of Counts. "I suppose I could have! I used to be remarkably witty in the old days you know. I even wrote scenes for a comedy. There were some admirable couplets. But it was never acted, you know! . . ."

"Oh how I should love to read it! Why, Zena, it would be just the thing, wouldn't it? We intend to get up theatricals, for patriotic contributions, Count, in aid of the wounded . . . if we could only get hold of this comedy of yours!"

"Why not? I could even write it out again—but I have quite forgotten it. However I do remember two or three puns in it. . . . (Here the Count kissed his finger-tips.) And altogether, when I was abroad I produced a real *furore*. I remember Lord Byron. He and I were on intimate terms. He danced the mazurka marvellously at the Vienna Congress."

"Lord Byron, Uncle! Come now, Uncle, what do you mean?"

"Why yes, Lord Byron. But perhaps it wasn't Lord Byron, either, but someone else. That's it—it wasn't Lord Byron, it was a Pole. I remember him perfectly now. And what a singular individual that Pole was—he gave himself out to be a count, but afterwards it was discovered that he was only a chef. But he danced the mazurka

marvellously, and in the end he broke his leg. I even wrote some verses about it at the time:

*To dance the mazurka
Our Pole was no shirker.*

It went on—I can't remember the rest. . . . It was something like this, I think:

*But he broke his leg when he fell on the floor,
And then our poor Pole never danced any more."*

"That was it, probably, Uncle," exclaimed Mozglyakov, becoming more and more enthusiastic.

"That was it, my friend," replied the Count, "or something like it. Perhaps it wasn't quite that, but they were very good verses. Altogether I've forgotten some of those events now. That comes of my being so busy."

"But tell us, Count, what you do all the time there, all by yourself?" inquired Marya Alexandrovna. "I thought of you so often, *mon cher prince*, and I admit I am burning with impatience to know more about you."

"Do? Well, on the whole, I am very busy you know. Sometimes I rest and sometimes, you know, I go for a walk and imagine all sorts of things."

"You must have a very strong imagination, Uncle."

"Very strong, my dear fellow. Sometimes I imagine things that astonish even myself. When I was at Kaduyev . . . *à propos*, weren't you vice-Governor of Kaduyev once?"

"Me, Uncle? For goodness' sake!" exclaimed Pavel Alexandrovich.

"Fancy that, my friend! And I took you all along for the vice-Governor, and kept wondering how it was he had suddenly become quite different? The vice-Governor had such a dignified clever face, you know. He was a very clever man, always writing poetry on all sorts of occa-

sions. He was a little bit—in profile, you know—like the king of diamonds. . . .”

“Count, Count!” interrupted Marya Alexandrovna. “I declare you are ruining yourself by such a life! To shut yourself up five years all alone, to see nobody, to hear nothing! Why you are a ruined man, Count! Ask anyone of those who are devoted to you, and they’ll tell you, you’re a ruined man!”

“Am I, really?” exclaimed the Count.

“I assure you! I speak to you as your friend, your sister. I tell you this because you are dear to me, because the memory of the past is sacred to me. What have I to gain by pretending? No, you must make a radical change in your life, otherwise you will fall ill, you will wear yourself out, you will die. . . .”

“Oh, heavens! Will I really die so soon?” exclaimed the Count in a panic. “And just fancy, you are quite right! I’ve been simply tortured by piles, especially of late . . . and when I have attacks there are the most astonishing symptoms (I will describe them to you in the utmost detail). In the first place. . . .”

“You can tell us another time, Uncle,” struck in Pavel Alexandrovich. “Isn’t it time for us to be off, now?”

“Yes, yes, another time! And perhaps it isn’t so interesting, either. I realize that now. And yet it’s an extremely curious disease. There are certain details. Remind me, my friend, I’ll tell you all about one case this evening.”

“But, Count, why don’t you go abroad for a cure?” interrupted Marya Alexandrovna once more.

“Abroad? Oh, yes, abroad. I shall certainly go abroad. I remember when I was abroad in the twenties, it was extraordinarily gay. I almost married a French viscountess. I was madly in love, ready to devote my whole life to her. But then somehow someone else married her, not me. And what a strange case it was—I was only away

from her for two hours, when another triumphed, a German banker he was. Afterwards he spent some time in a lunatic asylum."

"But, *cher prince*, I mention it because you must think seriously of your health. They have such splendid doctors abroad . . . and the change in itself would be so good for you. You must absolutely give up your Dunkanovo, if only for a short time."

"Ab-so-lute-ly. I have long ago determined to do so, I mean to go in for hy-dro-pathy, you know."

"Hydropathy?"

"Yes hydropathy. I took a course of hydropathy once. I was at some spa at the time. There was a lady from Moscow there. I can't remember her name, but she was a remarkably poetical woman—seventy years old, she was. She had a daughter with her, a widow, about fifty, with a wall-eye. She was always on the point of breaking into verse, too. After that she had some sort of an accident—she killed her maid-servant in a rage, and was tried for it. Anyhow, it was those two ladies who persuaded me to take the water-cure. I admit I was not ill at the time. But they went on at me—'take the cure, take the cure,' so I began drinking the waters, out of politeness. 'Perhaps it will really do me good,' I thought. I drank and I drank. I drank a whole waterfall, and hydropathy is a very useful thing you know, it did me a lot of good, and if I hadn't fallen ill towards the end, I assure you I should have been perfectly healthy."

"That's a perfectly logical conclusion, Uncle. Tell me, Uncle, have you ever studied logic?"

"Good heavens! What a question!" said Marya Alexandrovna, in a voice of shocked severity.

"I have, my friend, but it was a very long time ago. I even studied philosophy in Germany, I took a whole course, but afterwards I forgot it completely. I don't mind

admitting, you have frightened me so with those horrid diseases that I'm quite upset. But I'll soon be back."

"Why, where are you going, Count?" cried the astonished Marya Alexandrovna.

"Just a minute! I'll only jot down a new idea—*au revoir*—"

"What a man!" cried Pavel Alexandrovich, and he broke into peals of laughter.

Marya Alexandrovna lost patience.

"I don't understand, I simply don't understand what you're laughing at," she said angrily. "Laughing at a venerable, estimable old man, your relative, holding up his every word to scorn, exploiting his angelic goodness. I blushed for you, Pavel Alexandrovich! What do you find so ridiculous in him, I'd like to know? I see nothing ridiculous in him."

"And when he takes one person for another, when he lets his tongue run away with him?"

"That's the consequence of his terrible life, his terrible five years of imprisonment, under the surveillance of that infernal woman. He is to be pitied, not to be laughed at. He didn't even know *me*; you can testify to that yourself. That—why it's simply incredible! He absolutely must be saved! I suggest that he should go abroad, it's the only hope that he might get rid of that . . . market-woman."

"I'll tell you what—we must get him married, Marya Alexandrovna!" exclaimed Pavel Alexandrovich.

"Again! After that I can only call you incorrigible, Monsieur Mozglyakov!"

"Not at all, Marya Alexandrovna, not at all! This time I'm perfectly serious. Why not marry him off? It's quite an idea. *C'est une idée comme une autre!* What harm could it do him, I ask you? On the contrary, in his position it is his only salvation. Under the law, he could still marry. In the first place he would get rid of that hussy (pardon the expression!). In the second place, and this

is still more important, supposing he were to choose some girl, or better still, a widow, nice, kind, clever, tender, and—most important of all—poor, who would look after him like a daughter, who would realize that he was her benefactor in making her his wife. What could be better for him than someone of his very own, sincere and disinterested, who would always be at his side, instead of that . . . wench. Of course it must be someone pretty, Uncle still likes pretty women. Did you notice how he eyed Zenaida Afanasyevna?”

“But where will you find such a bride?” asked Nastasya Petrovna, who had been listening attentively.

“How can you ask? Why not you, if it suited you! Allow me to ask what unfits you to be the bride of a count? In the first place, you are pretty, in the second place you’re a widow, in the third place, you’re a lady, in the fourth place, you’re poor (for you are certainly not rich), in the fifth place, you’re a sensible woman, and in consequence would love him, surround him with every care, turn that other out by the neck, take him abroad, feed him on boiled semolina and *bonbons*, and all this up to the very moment when he departs this life, which will be in precisely a year’s time, or perhaps in a month or so. Then you will be a countess, a rich widow, and, as a reward for your courage can marry a marquis or a quartermaster general. *C’est joli*, isn’t it?”

“Bless my soul! Why, I think I should fall in love with him, the pet, out of sheer gratitude, if he made me an offer!” cried Madame Zyablova, and her dark expressive eyes gleamed. “But it’s all nonsense, of course!”

“Nonsense? Would you like it not to be nonsense? Ask me nicely, and you can cut off my finger if you’re not his affianced bride this very day. Nothing could be easier than to persuade or entice Uncle to do anything. He keeps saying: ‘Why yes, why yes!’ You heard him yourself. We’ll marry him off before he knows what we’re at. Why

we'll trick him into marrying! After all, it's for his own good, isn't it? You might as well make yourself look nice, Nastasya Petrovna, just in case."

Monsieur Mozglyakov's enthusiasm rose to a frenzy. And as for Madame Zyablova, sober-minded as she was, her mouth fairly watered.

"I am well aware, without your telling me, that I'm an utter fright today," she replied. "I've quite let myself go, it's a long time since I've thought about that sort of thing. And now I've become a regular frump. Do I really look like a cook?"

All this time Marya Alexandrovna sat there with a very strange expression on her face. I shall not be far wrong if I say she listened to Pavel Alexandrovich's strange suggestion with something like terror, as if stunned. At last she recovered.

"That's all very fine, no doubt, but it's a pack of nonsense, and what is more, it's perfectly irrelevant," she cut in harshly.

"But why, dear Marya Alexandrovna, why is it all nonsense and irrelevant?"

"For many reasons, but chiefly because you are in my house, and the Count is my guest, and I will not allow anyone to forget the respect due to my house. I regard your words as nothing but a joke, Pavel Alexandrovich. But here comes the Count himself!"

"Here I am!" cried the Count, coming into the room. "It's extraordinary, *cher ami*, what a number of ideas have come into my head today! Another time, you'd hardly believe it, there don't seem to be any there at all. I just sit and sit all day."

"Why, Uncle, it's probably because of your fall. It shook up your nerves, and now..."

"I put it down to that myself, my friend, and consider the experience as actually salutary. And so I have decided to pardon my Feofil. I'll tell you what—I don't believe

he made an attempt on my life. What do you think? Besides he was punished quite recently when I had his beard shaved off!"

"His beard, Uncle? But he had a beard as big as the map of Germany, hadn't he?"

"As big as Germany, to be sure! Altogether, my friend, you are perfectly correct in your conclusions. But it's a false one! Just fancy! All of a sudden I receive a catalogue. A splendid consignment of coachmen's and gentlemen's beards, also whiskers, imperials, moustaches, *et cetera*, has just arrived from abroad. And all of the best quality and at the most moderate prices. Well, I think, 'let's order a beard, just to see what it's like.' And so I ordered a coachman's beard, and really it was an admirable beard. But it appeared that Feofil's own beard was almost twice as big. Naturally the problem arises: should I have his beard shaved off or send the false beard back and let him wear his own. I thought and thought and decided it would be better for him to wear the artificial one."

"Probably because you consider art superior to nature, Uncle."

"Precisely so! But how he suffered when they shaved his beard off! You would have thought he was parting with his whole career and not just his beard. But isn't it time for us to be off, my dear fellow?"

"I'm ready, Uncle."

"I trust, Count, you'll only go to the Governor," cried Marya Alexandrovna. "You're *mine* now, Count, you belong to my family for the whole day. I don't mean to say anything bad about the society here, of course. Perhaps you'd rather stay with Anna Nikolayevna—I have no right to interfere. Besides, I'm perfectly sure that time will prove who is right. Only try to remember one thing: I am your hostess, your sister, your foster-mother, your nurse, for the rest of the day, and I confess, Count, that

I tremble for you. You do not, you cannot know these people thoroughly. Time will show!"

"Trust me, Marya Alexandrovna. I'll be as good as my word, see if I'm not!" said Mozglyakov.

"Trust a giddy-pate like you! As if you could be relied on! I shall expect you to dinner, Count. We dine early. Oh, how I regret that at such a moment my husband should be in the country! He would have been so glad to see you! He has such a deep respect, such a sincere affection for you!"

"Your husband? Have you a husband, too?" asked the Count.

"Oh, heavens! How absent-minded you are, Count! You have quite, quite forgotten the past. Surely you haven't forgotten my husband, Afanasy Matveich? He's in the country now, but you met over and over again in the old days. Surely you remember Afanasy Matveich!"

"Afanasy Matveich's in the country, just fancy, *mais c'est délicieux!* So you have a husband! What a very strange circumstance, though! It's exactly like a comedy—the husband comes home but the wife . . . oh, I've forgotten it again. Now where was it the wife went, I can't remember, but I know it was very funny."

"The husband came home, but the wife had flown, Uncle," Mozglyakov prompted him.

"Oh, yes, that was it! To be sure! Thanks, my friend, that was it! 'The wife had flown.' *Charmant, charmant!* It rhymes, too! You're very good at that sort of thing, my friend. I knew she had done something or other—eloped! But I seem to have forgotten what we were talking about. Oh, yes, so we'll be going, my friend. *Au revoir, madame, adieu, ma charmante demoiselle,*" added the Count, turning to Zena, and kissing the tips of his fingers.

"Dinner, Count, dinner! Don't forget to come back soon," Marya Alexandrovna cried after him.

CHAPTER V

"You might just look into the kitchen, Nastasya Petrovna," said Marya Alexandrovna after seeing the Count off. "I'm so afraid that rogue of a Nikita is going to spoil the dinner. I'm sure he's drunk already."

Nastasya Petrovna did as she was told. As she went out she cast a suspicious glance at Marya Alexandrovna and noticed the extraordinary agitation in her face. Instead of going to look after that rogue of a Nikita, Nastasya Petrovna went into the ball-room, from thence along the passage to her own room, and then into a small dark chamber, a kind of closet with trunks standing in it, various garments hanging on the wall, and the household wash done up in bundles. She tiptoed up to the locked door, and holding her breath, bent down to peep through the keyhole and listen. This door, which was one of the three leading into the room in which Zena and her mamma were sitting, was always kept locked and barred.

Marya Alexandrovna considered Nastasya Petrovna a designing but feather-brained woman. The possibility that Nastasya Petrovna eavesdropped had, of course, occurred to her now and then, but at this moment she was so absorbed and so excited, that she forgot certain precautions. She sat down in an armchair and looked significantly at Zena. Zena felt this glance on her and a feeling of alarm crept over her.

"Zena!"

Zena slowly turned her pale face and raised her black, pensive eyes.

"I wish to speak to you about something extremely important, Zena!"

Zena turned right round to face her mamma, folded her arms, and assumed an air of expectation. There was an expression of vexation and scorn in her face, which, however, she endeavoured to conceal.

"I want to ask you, Zena, what you thought of *that* Mozglyakov today?"

"You've known for a long time what I think of him," replied Zena reluctantly.

"Yes, *mon enfant*, but it seems to me that his attentions have become a little too importunate lately."

"He says he's in love with me, and his importunity is pardonable."

"Strange, you used not to be so ready to excuse him! On the contrary, you attacked him whenever I mentioned him."

"It is still stranger that you, who have always stood up for him, and were determined that I should marry him, are now the first to attack him."

"Granted! I do not deny it, Zena. I did wish you to marry Mozglyakov. I could not bear to witness your perpetual misery, your sufferings, which I am well able to understand (whatever you think of me) and which keep me awake at night. I finally became convinced that only some radical change in your life could save you! And this change must be marriage. We are not rich, we cannot, for instance, go abroad. The fools here are astonished that you are twenty-three and not married, and make up all sorts of stories about it. Do they think I would marry you to the privy councillor here, or to Ivan Ivanovich, our attorney? Are there any husbands for you here? Mozglyakov is a feather-brain, of course. Still he's better than the rest of them. He comes of a good family, is well-connected, and has a hundred and fifty serfs. That's better after all than living by all sorts of shifts, and God knows what adventures. And so I turned my attention to him. But I swear I never felt any real affection for him. I am sure that the Almighty sent me a warning. And if God should send us something at this juncture—oh what a good thing it will be that you haven't yet given him your

word! You didn't tell him anything definite today, did you, Zena?"

"Why all this mouthing, Mamma, when the whole thing can be put in a couple of words?" said Zena testily.

"Mouthing, Zena! You can use such a word to your mother! But what was I going to say? You have long stopped believing your mother. You have long grown to consider me your enemy, rather than your mother."

"Oh, never mind all that, Mamma! Are you and I to quibble about words? As if we didn't understand one another! It's about time we did, I think!"

"You insult me, my child! You don't believe I am ready to do anything, anything, to settle you in life!"

Zena cast a look of scorn and anger at her mother.

"I suppose you want to marry me to that Count, to *settle me* in life," she said, with a strange smile.

"I have not said a word about that, but since you mention it, if you *did* happen to marry the Count, it would be your happiness and not madness."

"And I consider it simply nonsense!" cried Zena passionately. "Nonsense, I say! And I consider, too, Mamma, that you have too much poetic inspiration, you are a poeless in the full sense of the word. That's what they call you here. You're always full of projects, and their impossibility and absurdity make no difference to you. I foresaw when the Count was sitting here that you had him in mind. When Mozglyakov played the fool and said the old man ought to be married I read all your thoughts in your face. I could have sworn that was what you were thinking about, and now you tell me yourself of it. I am beginning to be mortally sick of your plans—they are becoming a torture to me, I would ask you not to say another word about this, d'you hear, Mamma—not a word—I would like you to remember that!"

She was choking with rage.

"You are a child, Zena, an embittered, sick child," replied Marya Alexandrovna in sentimental, tearful accents. "You use disrespectful language to me, you insult me. No other mother would put up with what I have to endure from you daily. But you are upset, you are sick, you suffer, and I am a mother, and first and foremost, a Christian. It is my duty to endure patiently and forgive. But one word, Zena—if I really dream of this alliance, why should you consider it nonsense? I think Mozglyakov never spoke better sense than he did just now, in pointing out that marriage is just what the Count needs—but not to that slut Nastasya, of course! That was a little too much! He put his foot in it there."

"Listen to me, Mamma! Tell me frankly—is this mere idle talk on your part, mere curiosity, or do you mean it?"

"I only ask you why it seems to you such nonsense?"

"For goodness' sake!" exclaimed Zena, stamping her foot impatiently. "What have I done to deserve such a fate? I'll tell you why, since you don't seem to understand for yourself: not to mention all the other absurdities—to take advantage of the fact that the old fellow is feeble-minded, to deceive him, to marry him, a cripple, so as to get hold of his money, and then to long daily, hourly for his death, is in my opinion, not merely nonsense, it is base, so base, that I cannot congratulate you on having such ideas, Mamma."

There was a silence which lasted a minute.

"Zena! Have you forgotten what happened two years ago?" asked Marya Alexandrovna suddenly.

Zena started.

"Mamma!" she said sternly. "You gave your solemn promise never to remind me of that."

"And now, my child, I make a solemn request to be allowed for this once to break that vow, which I have never broken to this day. Zena! The time has come for us to have a good talk. These two years of silence have

been terrible. Things cannot go on like this. I am ready to go down on my knees and implore you to allow me to speak. Oh, Zena, your own mother implores you on her knees! And I will give you my solemn word—the word of an unhappy, doting mother—that never again, in any way whatsoever, in any circumstances whatsoever, even if it were to save my life, will I breathe a word about it. This will be the very last time, but now it is absolutely indispensable!”

Marya Alexandrovna was sure of producing her effect.

“You may go on,” said Zena, who had turned noticeably paler.

“Thank you, Zena. Two years ago a teacher used to come to poor Mitya, your little brother who died. . . .”

“Why do you begin so solemnly, Mamma? What’s the use of all this eloquence, all these details, so unnecessary, so tragic, and only too well known to us both?” Zena interrupted with a kind of embittered disgust.

“Because, my child, I, your mother, am now forced to justify myself in your eyes! Because I want to set matters before you in an entirely different light, and not in the erroneous light in which you are accustomed to regard them. Because, finally I want you to have a better understanding of the conclusions I intend to draw from all this. Do not think, my child, that I wish to play with your feelings. No, Zena, you will find in me a true mother, and perhaps, bathed in tears, you will yourself beg at my feet, at the feet of a base woman, as you called me just now, for the reconciliation you have up till now so proudly rejected. And Zena, that is why I want to say everything from the very beginning. If I cannot do this, I will hold my peace.”

“Go on,” repeated Zena, cursing with all her heart her Mamma’s thirst for eloquence.

“I will continue, Zena. This teacher in a provincial school, scarcely more than a boy, made an impression on

you which I have never been able to understand. I trust too much to your common sense, to your noble pride, and above all to his insignificance (we will be quite frank, won't we?) to harbour the slightest suspicions of anything between you. And suddenly you come to me with the firm declaration that you intend to marry him. Oh, Zena! It was a dagger in my heart. I screamed and swooned. But . . . you remember all that. Naturally I saw fit to use all my authority over you, an authority which you called tyranny. Only think—a mere boy, the son of a parish clerk, with a salary of twelve rubles a month, a writer of miserable doggerel published out of pity in the *Reader's Library*, and capable of nothing but talking about that accursed Shakespeare—and that boy to be your husband, the husband of Zenaida Moskaleva! It's worthy of Florian and his shepherds. Forgive me, Zena, but the very memory of it infuriates me! I rejected him, but no power on earth could stop you. Your father, of course, only blinked, he could not even understand what I was trying to tell him. You maintained relations with this boy, even met him, and, worst of all, you entered into correspondence with him. Rumours began to spread about the town. People began making insulting hints to me; they had already begun to rejoice, to shout from the roof-tops, when suddenly all that I had foretold came true in the most triumphant manner. You and he quarrelled about something, he showed himself unworthy of you, that boy (I simply cannot call him a man!), and threatened to circulate your letters about the town. At this threat, full of indignation, you were furious and gave him a box on the ear. Yes, Zena, I know that, too. I know all, all. The unfortunate creature that very day showed one of your letters to that scoundrel Zaushin, and an hour later it was in the hands of Natalya Dmitriyevna, my mortal enemy. The same evening that madman, smitten with remorse, made a ridiculous attempt to take poison. In a word the

scandal was atrocious. That slut Nastasya rushed to me in a fright with the terrible news. Your letter had been in the hands of Natalya Dmitriyevna an hour, in another two hours the whole town would know of your disgrace. I pulled myself together, I did not faint, but what a blow you struck at my heart, Zena! That shameless creature, that monster, Nastasya, demanded two hundred silver rubles, on receipt of which she undertook to get the letter back. I ran out in my slippers in the snow to the Jew Bumstein and pawned my necklace, a relic of my sainted mother. Two hours later the letter was in my hands. Nastasya stole it. She broke open a jewel-case, your honour was saved, there was no proof. But what a terrible day of anxiety you caused me! The next day I noticed for the first time in my life several grey threads in my hair, Zena! You are now able to judge of that boy's act! Perhaps you will agree, with, it may be, awry smile, that it would have been sheer folly to trust your fate to his hands. But ever since, you have suffered tortures, have tortured yourself, my child. You cannot forget him or rather not him, he was always unworthy of you, but the spectre of your former happiness. This unfortunate is now on his death-bed. They say he is in a consumption and you—angel of goodness that you are—will not marry while he is alive, so as not to cause him anguish, for he still suffers from jealousy, though I am quite certain he never loved you in a real, lofty way. I know how, when he heard of Mozglyakov paying you court, he spied, sent to find out, questioned people. You want to spare his feelings, my child, I have guessed your heart, haven't I? And God alone knows the bitter tears with which I have wet my pillow!...

"Enough, Mamma!" interrupted Zena, sick at heart. "Who cares about your pillow?" she added spitefully. "Can't you do without declamations and artifices?"

"You don't believe me, Zena! Don't look at me with enmity, my child! My eyes have not been dry these two years, but I hid my tears from you, and I swear I have undergone a great change myself in this time. I have long understood your feelings but, I swear to it, only now do I realize the full extent of your sorrow. Am I to be blamed, my dear, for having regarded this affection as mere romanticism, coming from that accursed Shakespeare, who is always sticking his nose in where he's not wanted? What mother would blame me for being alarmed, for taking measures, for the severity of my judgement? But now, now, after having witnessed your two years of suffering, I understand and appreciate your feelings. Believe me, I now understand you better than you understand yourself. I am certain that it is not him, that unnatural boy, whom you love, but your own golden dreams, your lost happiness, your lofty ideals. I, too, have loved, perhaps still more intensely than you. I have known suffering—I, too, have had my lofty ideals. You should be the last to blame me for seeing in an alliance with the Count the one thing that can save you, the one thing that your present situation requires."

Zena listened in amazement to this long oration, knowing very well that Mamma would never affect this tone without cause. But the ultimate, unexpected conclusion quite overwhelmed her.

"Do you mean to say you seriously wish to marry me to that Count?" she cried in astonishment, glancing at her mother with something akin to terror. "So these are no mere daydreams, no mere vague plans, but your firm intention! So I was right in my surmise! But—but—how is this marriage to save me, why is it essential for my present situation? And . . . and . . . what is the connection between all this and what you have just spoken about—all that has passed? I simply cannot understand you, Mamma!"

"I am surprised, *mon ange*, that you can't understand this!" exclaimed Marya Alexandrovna, herself infected by Zena's agitation. "To begin with, it would instantly place you in different surroundings, in another world. You would leave for ever this nasty little hole, so full of terrible memories for you, where you find no welcome, no friend, where you have been slandered, where all those magpies hate you for your beauty. You could even go abroad in the spring, to Italy, to Switzerland, to Spain—to Spain, Zena, where there is the Alhambra, where there is the Guadalquivir, instead of the wretched little stream here with its indecent name—"

"But wait a bit, Mamma, you speak as if I were already married, or as if the Count had at least proposed—"

"Don't you worry about that, my love, I know what I'm talking about. But let me go on. I have told you my *first* argument, now comes the *second*. I understand, my child, how distasteful it would be for you to give your hand to Mozglyakov."

"You don't have to tell me that I shall never be his wife," replied Zena passionately, her eyes blazing. "I know that myself!"

"If you only knew how well I understand your disgust, my dear! It is terrible to swear before the altar of God to love one whom one can never love! Terrible to belong to one whom one cannot even respect! And it is your love he demands; that is what he wants to marry you for, I can see it in the way he gazes at you when you're not looking. How terrible to be always pretending! I have had twenty-five years of that myself, your father ruined my life. I may say he sucked my youth dry, and how often have you witnessed my tears!"

"Papa's away in the country, kindly leave him alone," replied Zena.

"You always stick up for him, I know that. Oh, Zena, how my heart sank when I decided to make a marriage

of convenience for you with Mozglyakov! But there need be no pretence with the Count. It goes without saying that you could not love him . . . that way; he is *incapable* of claiming that sort of love anyhow. . . .”

“Oh, my God, what nonsense! I can tell you you are mistaken right from the beginning, in the first, most important point. Know then, that I will not sacrifice myself for an unknown reason. Know then, that I shall never marry, that I shall remain single. You have been pestering me to get married these two years. And now you’ll have to reconcile yourself. I won’t and that’s all. There’s nothing to be done about it!”

“Zena, darling, don’t get angry, for God’s sake, before you have heard me out! How hasty you are! Just look at things from my point of view, and you will agree with me at once. The Count will live a year, at the most two, surely it would be better to be a young widow than an old maid, not to mention that after his death you will be a countess, free, rich, and independent. You may regard all such calculations with scorn, my dear—calculations as to his death. But I am a mother, and what mother will blame me for my foresight? And if, after all, in your angelic goodness, you still pity that boy, pity him so much that you don’t even want to marry while he is still alive (as I guess to be the case) then think how, in marrying the Count you will raise his spirits, gladden him! If he has a grain of common-sense he will of course realize that it would be out of place, ridiculous to be jealous of the Count. He will understand that it is a marriage of convenience, of necessity. And, finally, he will understand—I only mean that after the Count dies, you can marry **anyone** you like!”

“In other words—marry the Count, rob him, and wait for him to die so as to marry the man I love! Your calculations are very ingenious. You want to tempt me, by proposing—I understand you, Mamma, I thoroughly under-

stand you. You can't help making a show of your noble feelings, even in a revolting affair. Why didn't you say frankly and simply: 'Zena, this is base, but it is profitable, and you must therefore consent to it!' That would at least have been honest."

"But why regard it from that point of view, my child, from the point of view of deception, guile, and avarice? You consider my calculations low, deceitful. But in the name of all that is holy, where is the baseness, the deception in it? Look at yourself in the glass—you, so beautiful that anyone might give a kingdom to win you! And all of a sudden you, a beauty, sacrifice the best years of your life to an old man! You, a brilliant star, light up the sunset of his life! You, like the green ivy on the garden wall, wind yourself around his old age; you, and not that weed, that loathsome woman who has thrown a spell on him and is greedily sucking his blood! Are his money and his rank really worth more than you? Where's the baseness, the deception here? You don't know what you're saying, Zena!"

"They are evidently worth a great deal since one must marry a cripple to get them. Deception is always deception, Mamma, whatever the aim."

"Not at all, my dear, not at all! It can be regarded from a lofty, even a Christian point of view, my child. You once told me in a fit of rage that you wanted to be a sister of mercy. Your heart had suffered and become hardened. You said (you *did*) it could no longer love. If you don't believe in love, then apply your feelings to some other more lofty object, do so sincerely, like a child, in complete trust and purity—and God will bless you. That old man has suffered, too, he is unhappy, persecuted. I have known him for years and have always felt an inexplicable sympathy for him, a kind of love, as if I had a presentiment. Be his friend, be his daughter, be, if you will, his plaything—if everything is to be put into words. But warm his

heart, and you will do that for God, you will be doing a good deed. He is ridiculous—but never mind that. He is only half human—pity him! You are a Christian. Compel yourself—such deeds are done from compulsion. It seems hard to us to have to dress wounds in a hospital. It is loathsome to breathe the infected air of a pest-house. But there are angels of God who do this and bless the Lord for their vocation. Here is balm for your wounded heart, an occupation, a pious task—here is a way to heal your wounds. Where is the selfishness, the baseness in that? You don't believe me! You think perhaps I am dissembling, when I speak of duty, of good deeds. You cannot understand that I, a vain society woman, can have a heart, feelings, principles. Ah well, I do not ask you to believe me! I do not even ask you not to insult your mother, I only ask you to agree that her words are reasonable, that there is salvation in them. Try to imagine that it is not I but someone else speaking. Shut your eyes, turn away, imagine that an invisible voice is speaking to you. You are disgusted, above all, that this will be done for money, that it is a sort of sale and purchase. Very well then, refuse the money if money is so hateful to you. Leave yourself enough to live on and give the rest to the poor. You could, for instance, help that unfortunate on his death-bed."

"He will accept no aid," said Zena softly, as if speaking to herself.

"He won't, but his mother will," replied Marya Alexandrovna triumphantly. "She will take it secretly, so that he does not know. You sold your earrings, your aunt's gift, to help her, six months ago. I know that. I know the old woman takes in washing, to feed her unfortunate son."

"He will soon be in no need of help."

"I know what you mean by that, too," interposed Marya Alexandrovna and she was visited by an inspiration, a pure inspiration. "I know what you mean. They say he

is in consumption and will soon die. But who says that? The other day I inquired about him from Kallist Stanislavich. I asked after him because I have a heart, Zena. Kallist Stanislavich told me that while his illness is of course very serious, he is convinced that it is not consumption the poor thing is suffering from, but only a very severe affection of the chest. You can ask him yourself. He told me definitely that, under other circumstances, especially a change of climate and impressions, the patient might recover. He told me, and I have heard about it before, read it in a book, that there is some extraordinary island near the coast of Spain, Malaga I think—it's like some wine, I know—where not only people with weak chests, but real consumptives recover completely from the climate alone, and that people go there on purpose to get well, only the upper classes, of course, or maybe even merchants, too, but only very rich ones. And that magical Alhambra, those myrtles, those lemons, those Spaniards riding on their mules—in themselves make such an extraordinary impression on a poetical nature! You think he wouldn't accept your help, your money for such a journey? Then deceive him, if you pity him! Deceit is pardonable when the life of a human being is at stake. Encourage him, promise him, if you will, your love. Say you'll marry him when you are a widow. Anything can be made to sound noble. Your mother is not likely to teach you anything ignoble, you will do it to save his life and therefore anything is permissible. You will revive him with hope. He will begin to look after his health himself, to take advice, to heed the doctors. He will try to get well in order to be happy. If he recovers, even if you do not marry him in the end, at least he will have recovered, you will have saved him, brought him back to life! And after all why shouldn't you regard him with compassion? Perhaps fate has taught him, changed him for the better, and if he should be worthy of you, why you can marry him

when you become a widow. You will be rich, independent. Having helped him to recover, you can get him social position, help him to a career. Your marriage to him will be more pardonable than now, when it is impossible. What is in store for you both if you should resolve on such madness? Nothing but contempt, poverty, tweaking little boys' ears (for that goes with his profession), reading Shakespeare together, tied down for life to Mordasov, and finally, his death, soon and inevitable. Whereas, if you bring him back to life, it will be for a useful life, for good deeds. By pardoning him you will make him adore you. He is racked with remorse for his odious act, and you, in making a new life possible for him, in pardoning him, will give him hope, reconcile him to himself. He can work in a government office, gain promotion and rank. Finally, even should he not recover, he will at least die happy, at peace with himself, in your arms—for you will be able to be with him at that moment—assured of your love, of your forgiveness, beneath the shade of myrtles, lemons, beneath an exotic azure sky. Oh, Zena, all this is within your grasp! All the advantages are on your side—and all this you will gain by marrying the Count!"

Marya Alexandrovna stopped speaking. A prolonged silence ensued. Zena was in a state of inexpressible agitation.

We will not undertake to describe Zena's emotions, for we cannot divine them. But apparently Marya Alexandrovna had found the road to her heart. Uncertain of the state of her daughter's heart at the moment, she had made a review of every possible supposition, and at last saw that she had found the right path. She had fumbled for the sorest places in Zena's heart with a coarse touch, and, according to her habit, could not forego a display of the loftiest feelings, which naturally did not make any impression on Zena. "Never mind if she doesn't believe me," Marya Alexandrovna told herself, "so long as I can get

her to think it over. The great thing is to throw out subtle hints about what cannot be said outright." Thus arguing, she achieved her aim. The effect was produced. Zena listened eagerly. Her cheeks burned, her breast heaved.

"Listen, Mamma," she said resolutely at last, while the sudden pallor spreading over her cheeks clearly showed what her firmness cost her. "Listen, Mamma—"

But at that moment a sudden noise in the entrance hall and a strident voice inquiring for Marya Alexandrovna caused Zena to check herself. Marya Alexandrovna jumped up from her seat.

"Oh, my God!" she cried. "The devil has brought that magpie, the colonel's wife, here! Why, I all but turned her out of the house a fortnight ago!" she added almost in despair. "But . . . but, I shall have to receive her now! I must! She's probably brought some news, or she would not dare to show herself here. It's very important, Zena! I must know . . . I cannot afford to despise any means just now.

"How good of you to come and see me!" she cried, rushing to meet the new arrival. "What made you think of me, dear, dear Sofya Petrovna? What a delightful surprise!"

Zena fled from the room.

CHAPTER VI

Sofya Petrovna Farpukhina, the colonel's lady, was only morally like a magpie. Physically she was more like a sparrow. She was a freckled little woman of fifty with sharp eyes, and yellowish splotches all over her face. Her small withered body, perched on thin, but sturdy, sparrow's legs, was attired in a dress of dark silk which was always rustling, since the colonel's wife could not keep still for a couple of seconds at a time. She was a most

vindictive gossip, and could never forget that her husband was a colonel. She quarrelled frequently with her husband, the retired colonel, sometimes even scratching his face. In addition to this she drank four tumblers of vodka in the morning and an equal number in the evening, and hated Anna Nikolayevna Antipova, who had turned her out of her house the week before, as she did Natalya Dmitriyevna Paskudina, for co-operating in this.

"I've only dropped in for a moment, *mon ange*," she twittered. "I really oughtn't to sit down. I've only come to tell you the miracles going on here. The whole town has gone simply mad about that Count! Our clever folk, *vous comprenez*, are trying to hook him, hunting him hither and thither, pouncing on him, treating him to champagne, you'd hardly believe it, you'd hardly believe it! How could you let him go? D'you know he's at Natalya Dmitriyevna's just now?"

"At Natalya Dmitriyevna's!" cried Marya Alexandrovna starting from her chair in her excitement. "Why, he was only going to the Governor's and then, perhaps to Anna Nikolayevna's, and only for a moment."

"Only a moment, is it? Just try and catch him now! The Governor was out, so he went to Anna Nikolayevna and promised to dine there, and that Natalya, who never leaves her side now, dragged him off to have lunch with her. There's your Count for you!"

"And what about Mozglyakov? He promised..."

"You and your Mozglyakov! That paragon of yours! Why, he went there with him! Look out—if they get him down to the card table he'll lose again, as he did last year! And they'll get the Count to play, too, and strip him bare. And the things she spreads around, that Natalya! Shouting at the top of her voice that you tried to entice the Count for ... you know ... certain reasons—*vous comprenez*? Tells him so herself. Of course he doesn't understand a word, and just sits there like a drowned kit-

ten, answering 'why yes, why yes' to everything. You ought to have seen her! Brought out her Sonka, fancy: fifteen years and still in short skirts! Right above the knees, you know! Sent for that orphan, Mashka, and she came in a short dress too—but still higher above the knees—I looked at it through my lorgnette. . . . Stuck some kind of red caps with feathers on them on their heads—I'm sure I don't know what they're supposed to mean—and made those two chits dance a Ukrainian dance, to the piano, in front of the Count. Well, you know the Count's weakness. He simply melted. 'What shapes!' he kept saying, 'what shapes!' Looked at them through his lorgnette, and they fairly outdid themselves, the two magpies. Got all red, flinging out their legs, a regular *mon plaisir*, I declare, nothing less. Ugh! Is that what you call dancing? I did a shawl-dance myself on prize-day at Madame Jarni's boarding school for young ladies—the effect was elegant. Senators applauded. The daughters of counts and countesses were brought up there! But what these girls do is no better than a can-can. I burned with shame, literally burned. I could hardly sit there!"

"But . . . were you at Natalya Dmitriyevna's yourself? I thought you. . . ."

"You mean because she insulted me last week? I tell everybody about it, straight out. *Mais, ma chère*, I wanted to have a peep at the Count, if only through the keyhole, so I went there. Where else could I have seen him? I would never have gone to her but for that nasty little Count. Fancy—they gave everyone but me chocolate, and never said one word to me all the time. She did it out of spite—the fat tub! I'll pay her! Well good-bye, *mon ange*, I must hurry, hurry—I simply must catch Akulina Panfilovna and tell her! But you may as well say good-bye to the Count, you know. He won't be here any more. He has no memory, you know, and Anna Nikolayevna is certain to drag him over to her house. They're all afraid you

might, you know what. I mean ... about Zena, you know...."

"*Quelle horreur!*"

"You can take it from me. The whole town is talking about it. Anna Nikolayevna is determined to make him stay to dinner and then keep him for good. She's doing it to spite you, *mon ange*. I peeped into their yard through a chink in the fence. Such doings—cooking, knives rattling—champagne sent for. Hurry, hurry, catch him while he's going to her, on the way! After all he promised to have dinner with you first. He's your guest, not hers. Don't let that intrigante, that scum have the laugh of you. She's not worth the sole of my shoe, even if her husband is the attorney! I'm a colonel's wife myself! I was brought up in Madame Jarni's boarding school for young ladies.... Ugh! *Mais adieu, mon ange!* My sleigh is waiting, or I'd go in yours...."

The walking newspaper vanished. Marya Alexandrovna was all a-flutter with excitement, but the advice of the colonel's lady had been extremely lucid and practical. There was no time to be lost, she must not delay. But the principal difficulty still remained unsolved. Marya Alexandrovna rushed into Zena's room!

Zena, pale and agitated, was pacing the floor, her arms folded, her head drooping. There were tears in her eyes. But there was resolution in the glance she directed at her mother. Suppressing her tears hastily, she smiled sarcastically.

"Mamma," she said, before Marya Alexandrovna could speak. "You expended a great deal of your eloquence on me just now, a great deal too much. But you did not throw dust in my eyes. I am not a child. To tell myself that I am acting like a sister-of-mercy, without the slightest vocation, to justify, under a pretence of noble aims, a baseness founded on nothing but selfishness, would be mere Jesuitry and I will not allow myself to be taken in

by it. I will not—d'you hear me? I want you to be quite sure of that."

"But, *mon ange!*" cried Marya Alexandrovna, cowed for the moment.

"Silence, Mamma! Have the patience to hear me out. Despite the full consciousness that all this is mere Jesuitry, despite my complete conviction of the utter ignobility of such an act—I accept your proposal unreservedly, *unreservedly*, I say, and declare to you that I am ready to marry the Count and even ready to support all your efforts to make him marry me. Why I do this it is not necessary for you to know. Enough that I have so resolved. I have made up my mind to everything—I will bring him his boots, I will be his servant, I will dance for his pleasure, to make up for my baseness to him. I will use every possible means to prevent him from regretting that he married me. But in return for my resolution I demand that you tell me frankly—how do you intend going about it? Since you speak of it so insistently it means you have some definite plan in your head. I know you—you would never have broached the subject otherwise. Be frank for once in your life. Frankness is the condition I impose. I cannot make up my mind without knowing exactly how you are going to bring it all about!"

Marya Alexandrovna was so bewildered by Zena's unexpected attack, that for some time she stood in front of her dumb and motionless with astonishment, gazing at her intently. She had been prepared to wage a struggle against the obstinate romanticism of her daughter, of whose austere nobility she lived in constant fear, and suddenly she was told that her daughter quite agreed with her and was ready for all, despite her own principles. Consequently the matter was on a remarkably sound footing—and her eyes gleamed with joy.

"My own Zena!" she exclaimed enthusiastically. "Zena, you are my own flesh and blood!"

She could say no more, and rushed up to her daughter to embrace her.

"Oh, my God! I did not ask for your embraces, Mamma!" she cried with impatient disgust. "I have no need of your ecstasies. I ask for an answer to my question, and nothing more."

"But, Zena, I love you, I adore you, and you repulse me. . . . After all it's for your happiness I am working."

And genuine tears gleamed in her eyes. Marya Alexandrovna really did love Zena, *in her own way*, and now her success and agitation worked on her emotions to an excessive degree. Zena knew that for all her narrowness of outlook, her mother loved her, and she felt this love as a burden. Indeed she would have felt better if her mother had detested her.

"Well, don't be angry, Mamma," she said, trying to console her, "I'm upset, you know."

"I'm not angry, my love," twittered Marya Alexandrovna reviving immediately. "I quite understand how upset you are. Well then, my dear, since you demand frankness, I will be frank, perfectly frank, I assure you. If only you will believe me! In the first place I must tell you that I have as yet no completely definite plan, that is to say in all its details, for that would be impossible. You are a clever girl and you will see why this is so. I even foresee certain difficulties. Only a minute ago that magpie was chattering about all sorts of things. . . . (Oh, heavens, I must hurry!) You see I am being quite frank. But I swear to you I will gain my end!" she added ecstatically. "This certainty of mine is no mere daydream as you called it just now, my love. It is founded on fact. It is founded on the utter feeble-mindedness of the Count, and that you know is a sheet on which any pattern may be drawn. The great thing is that nobody should interfere. I'm not going to let those imbeciles outwit me!" she cried her eyes blazing as she smote the table with her hand. "I'll see to that."

But for this I must start as soon as possible, the main *coup* must be brought off this very day, if possible."

"Very well, Mamma, but listen to one more—*revelation*. Do you know why I take so much interest in your plan, and why I don't believe in it? It is because I don't trust myself. I told you I had made up my mind to this baseness, but if the details of your plan turn out to be too loathsome, too revolting, I must tell you I shall not be able to stand it, I shall throw the whole thing up. This is a new form of baseness, you see—to make up one's mind to base actions, and to fear to touch filth—but what's to be done? It will turn out like that, I know it will."

"But what is there so base in it, *mon ange*?" objected Marya Alexandrovna timidly. "After all it's nothing but an advantageous marriage, and everybody aims at that! Only look at it from that point of view and all will appear perfectly meritorious."

"Oh, Mamma, no pretence with me, for God's sake! You see I agree to everything—everything! What more do you want? You mustn't mind if I call things by their names. This is my only consolation now."

A wry smile appeared on her lips.

"All right, all right, my love, we may disagree about ideas, and yet have a mutual respect for one another. But if you are worried about details and are afraid they will be unpleasant, just leave all the trouble to me. I swear you shall not have a single splash of mud. As if I could wish to compromise you! Only trust to me and everything will go splendidly, in the most genteel—genteel, mind you—manner. There won't be the slightest scandal, or if there should be some tiny, unavoidable scandal (you never can tell!) we shall be far away by then. We shan't be here, you know—we shall be far away. Let them shout themselves hoarse, what do we care? It'll only be their jealousy. Are they worth worrying about? I'm surprised

at you, Zena—don't be angry with me, now!—you with your pride to be afraid of them!"

"Oh, Mamma, I'm not a bit afraid of them! You don't understand me at all!" replied Zena irritably.

"Come, come, darling, don't be angry! I only meant that they contrive some dirty trick or other every blessed day, and you will only be doing it just this once in your whole life. . . . But fool that I am, how I do run on! There's not the slightest harm in it. On the contrary, it's perfectly honourable. I'll prove that to you, Zena. In the first place, I repeat, everything depends on the point of view. . . ."

"Enough of your proofs, Mamma!" cried Zena furiously, stamping with impatience.

"All right, darling, I won't do it any more, it's only my tongue again. . . ."

A slight pause ensued. Marya Alexandrovna followed Zena about humbly, looking anxiously into her eyes, as a small dog that knows it has done wrong looks into its mistress's eyes.

"I can't imagine how you mean to set about it," continued Zena fastidiously. "I'm sure you will meet with nothing but infamy. I hold their opinions in contempt, but you will feel yourself disgraced."

"Oh, if that's all that's worrying you, my love, you need have no anxiety! I beg you, I implore you! So long as we are in agreement you needn't worry about me. If you only knew the narrow escapes I have had! I have had worse things than this to overcome. Only give me a chance! Whatever happens the first thing is to get the Count to ourselves as soon as possible. That's the very first thing. All the rest will depend on that. I have a presentiment that they'll all be up in arms but never mind that. I'll beat them off unaided. The only one who does rather alarm me is Mozglyakov."

"Mozglyakov?" echoed Zena contemptuously.

"Aye, Mozglyakov. But don't you worry, Zena! I swear I'll lead him to the life point when he'll help us himself! You don't know me yet, Zena! You don't know what I'm like in action. Oh, Zena, my darling! The moment I heard about the Count my thoughts took fire. A great light seemed suddenly to dawn on me. Who would ever have thought he would come to us? Why, there won't be such a chance again in a thousand years! Zena! My dear love! The dishonour is not in your marrying an old man and a cripple, but in your marrying one you cannot bear, and whose wife you would have to be in good earnest. You will not be a real wife to the Count. It won't be a marriage! Just a family arrangement. All the advantage will be on his side, the fool—fancy having such precious happiness bestowed on him all of a sudden! Oh, how lovely you are today, Zena! You're not just a beauty, you're a beauty of beauties. If I were a man I would get you half a kingdom, if you wanted it. What asses they all are! Who wouldn't want to kiss this little hand?" And Marya Alexandrovna kissed her daughter's hand passionately. "This is my body, my flesh and blood! He shall marry you if it has to be done by force, the fool! And what a life you and I will have, my pet! You won't drive your mother away when you come into your happiness, will you? We may have quarrelled, my love, but you have never had a friend like me. After all—"

"Mamma, since you have made up your mind, perhaps it's time for you—to be doing something. You're only wasting time here," said Zena impatiently.

"High time, Zena, high time! What a chatterbox I am!" cried Marya Alexandrovna. "They're trying to lure the Count away for good. I'll get into the carriage and start this moment! I'll go to the house, ask for Mozglyakov and then—I'll get the Count away—by force if necessary! Good-bye, Zena, good-bye, my darling, don't fret, have no doubts, do not grieve, above all, do not grieve! Every-

thing will turn out splendidly, as nicely as possible! The great thing is the point of view . . . good-bye, good-bye!"

Marya Alexandrovna made the sign of the cross over Zena, hurried out of the room, turned herself in front of her mirror for a moment, and two minutes later was gliding along the streets of Mordasov in her horse-sleigh, which was always got ready at about this hour, in case she should wish to drive. Marya Alexandrovna lived *en grand*.

"Oh, no! You won't outwit me!" she said to herself, as she sat in her carriage. "Zena agrees, so half the matter is accomplished. And yet it may all fall through! Nonsense! Zena! Zena! She came round in the end! So certain calculations have their effect on her mind, have they? I held out an extremely alluring prospect to her. I touched the right spot. But how lovely she is today, how lovely! If I had been so beautiful, I would have turned half Europe upside down to suit me. Well, wait and see . . . Shakespeare will be nowhere when she becomes a countess and gets to know a thing or two. What does she know? Mordasov and that tutor. . . . What a countess she will make! I love that pride of hers, she's so daring, so aloof! She looks every inch a queen! How could she help not seeing where her advantage lay—how could she? But . . . she's seen it now and the rest will come. . . . After all I shall be at her side. In the end she'll agree with me on all points, and she won't be able to get on without me! I shall be a countess myself, they'll get to know me in Petersburg, too. Farewell, wretched townlet! The Count will die, that boy will die, and then I'll marry her to a prince of the blood. My only fear is that I may have trusted her too far. Was I too outspoken? Did I get too sentimental? She alarms me, oh how she alarms me!"

And Marya Alexandrovna became absorbed in her meditations. They were certainly anxious ones. But, as they say: "Where there's a will, there's a way!"

Left to herself, Zena paced long up and down her room, deep in thought, her arms folded. She had much to think of. She kept repeating almost unconsciously: "High time—high time!" What did this fragmentary exclamation mean? More than once tears glittered on her long, silky eyelashes. She made no attempt to dry them, or to check them. But her mamma need not have worried, or endeavoured to penetrate into her daughter's heart. Zena had quite made up her mind and was prepared for all the consequences.

"So that's it!" said Nastasya Petrovna to herself, emerging from the closet when the Colonel's lady had gone. "And I was going to put on a pink bow for that old Count! I was fool enough to believe he would marry me! There's a pink bow for you! Aha, Marya Alexandrovna! So I'm a slut, a beggar, I take two-hundred-ruble bribes! Did you think I'd let you off and not take anything, my fine lady? I took it in the most genteel way. I took it for expenses in connection with the affair . . . how d'you know I didn't have to give a bribe myself? What's it to you if I did not scruple to break the lock with my own hands? I did your dirty work, my fine lady! All you have to do is to sit at your embroidery. Just you wait, I'll show you embroidery! I'll show the two of you what sort of a slut I am! You'll see how meek Nastasya Petrovna is!"

CHAPTER VII

Marya Alexandrovna allowed herself to be carried away by her evil genius. She had thought out an audacious, a magnificent plan. To marry her daughter to a wealthy man, a count and a cripple, to marry her secretly, so that none should discover it beforehand, taking advantage of the feeble-mindedness and helplessness of her guest, to act like a thief in the night as Marya Alexandrovna's foes

put it—all this was not merely bold, it was audacious. The plan was brilliant, but were it to fail the disgrace to its author would be appalling. Marya Alexandrovna knew this, but did not despair. "You have no idea what narrow escapes I have had," she had told Zena, speaking no more than the truth. Otherwise she could not have been called a heroine.

All this undoubtedly smacked of highway robbery, but Marya Alexandrovna was not greatly concerned about this, either. In this regard she clung to the incontrovertible truth: "Once they're married no one can unmarry them," a simple statement which fascinated her imagination by holding out advantages, the very thought of which made Marya Alexandrovna's blood tingle and caused her to shake all over. She was all the time in a state of frantic agitation and could hardly keep still in her carriage. Since she was an inspired woman, gifted with undoubted creative powers, she already had her plan of action drawn up. This plan was still in the rough, still a mere outline, it only glimmered faintly before her as yet. There was a multitude of details and unforeseen situations to be reckoned with. But Marya Alexandrovna was sure of herself. It was not the fear of failure which disturbed her—oh, no! All she wanted was to plunge into the fray as soon as possible. Impatience, noble impatience, burned in her at the thought of delays and obstacles. But since we have mentioned obstacles, we will crave permission to expand our idea somewhat. Marya Alexandrovna anticipated that the worst of these would be set by her worthy fellow citizens, the inhabitants of Mordasov, especially the genteel society of Mordasov ladies. She knew by experience their irreconcilable hatred for herself. She was, for instance, thoroughly aware that her intentions were already common knowledge in the town at this very moment, although no one had as yet spoken of them to anyone else. She knew from constant

bitter experience that nothing, however secretly guarded, had ever taken place in her house in the morning, without coming by the evening to the knowledge of every market woman, of everyone behind the counter in every little shop. So far, Marya Alexandrovna had mere forebodings of disaster, but such forebodings never deceived her. And they did not deceive her now. This is what actually happened, and what she did not yet know for certain. About noon, that is to say precisely three hours after the arrival of the Count in Mordasov, strange rumours circulated in the town. Where they sprang from is not known, but they spread almost instantaneously. People suddenly began assuring one another that Marya Alexandrovna had already made a match between the Count and her Zena, her dowerless, twenty-three-year-old Zena, that Mozglyakov had been given his *congé*, and that all was resolved and the contract signed. What gave rise to such rumours? Could it be that everyone knew Marya Alexandrovna so thoroughly as to straightway hit the mark of her secret thoughts and dreams? Neither the fact that such a rumour was inherently absurd—for how could such matters be settled in the course of an hour? Nor the obvious unreliability of such rumours—since no one could discover where they originated—could shake the Mordasovians. The rumour grew and struck root with extraordinary obstinacy. Most remarkable of all is the fact that it started at the precise moment when Marya Alexandrovna embarked upon her conversation with Zena on that very subject. Such is the intuition of provincials! The intuition of provincial newsmongers sometimes borders on the miraculous, and the reason for this is not far to seek. It is based upon the most intimate, absorbing, and prolonged study of one another. Every provincial seems to live behind a wall of glass. There is not the slightest possibility of concealing anything whatsoever from one's esteemed fellow citizens. They know you through and through, they

even know things about you that you do not know yourself. The provincial would seem to be a psychologist instinctively versed in the lore of the human heart by nature. That is why I am sometimes frankly astonished at meeting in a provincial town, instead of psychologists and mind-readers, such great numbers of asses. But we digress—this is a mere stray thought. The tidings broke like a thunder-storm. To marry the Count struck everyone as so advantageous, so brilliant, that the strangeness of it did not occur to anyone. Another circumstance is worthy of mention: Zena was for some unknown reason hated almost more than Marya Alexandrovna. Her beauty may have been partly the cause, and after all Marya Alexandrovna was one of themselves—a *bird of a feather*. If she had vanished from the town, who knows, perhaps she would have been missed. She enlivened society by the perpetual stories told about her. But for her, life would have been dull. Zena, on the contrary, behaved as if she lived in the clouds, and not in the town of Mordasov. She did not seem to belong there, she seemed to be above her fellow citizens and, perhaps unconsciously, treated them with intolerable arrogance. And all of a sudden this very Zena of whom such scandalous tales had been told, this stuck-up Zena was to become a millionairess, a countess, to enter the aristocracy. In a year or two, as a widow, she would marry a grand-duke, perhaps even a general. Who knows, she might marry a governor? (The Governor of Mordasov, as it happened, was a widower and extremely partial to the female sex.) Then she would be the first lady in the gubernia and the very idea of this was, of course, odious, so that never had any news aroused so much indignation in Mordasov as the news that Zena was going to marry the Count. From all sides embittered cries were immediately heard. It was a sin! they cried, it was base! The old man was insane, he was being deceived, tricked, hoodwinked, his feeble-mindedness was being

taken advantage of! The old man must be delivered from such bloodthirsty talons, the thing was sheer highway robbery and depravity! Finally, in what way was Zena better than many others? Others might equally well have married the Count. All these arguments and exclamations were as yet merely surmised by Marya Alexandrovna, but for her this was enough. She knew very well that everyone, simply everyone, would be ready to do all that was possible, even all that was impossible, to prevent her from carrying out her intentions. Were they not already trying to abduct the Count, so that it would require something like force to get him back? Finally, even if she were able to catch the Count and lure him back to her, it would be impossible to keep him on a leash for ever. And again—where was the guarantee that this very day, in two or three hours, the whole triumphant choir of Mordasov ladies would not turn up in her salon, and on such a plea that it would be impossible to refuse entry to them? If you shut the door in their faces they would get in through the window; and this, almost incredible as it may sound, had been done before in Mordasov. In a word there was not an hour, not a moment of time to be lost, and yet a beginning had not even been made. Suddenly a brilliant idea flashed through the brain of Marya Alexandrovna and instantly matured there. We shall not omit to discuss this new idea at the proper time. We will now merely state that at this moment our heroine was being carried swiftly along the streets of Mordasov, menacing and inspired, ready for a veritable battle, if this should appear necessary, to get the Count back. She did not as yet know how this would be done and where she would meet him, but she did know, and for certain, that she would let Mordasov sink through the earth sooner than yield an inch of her present intentions.

The first step was a brilliant success. She managed to catch the Count out of doors, and bore him back to

dinner with her. If it is asked how, despite all the trumps held by her enemies, she was able to hold her own and leave Anna Nikolayevna in the lurch, I am bound to state that I consider such a question an insult to Marya Alexandrovna. As if there could be any doubt as to her gaining a victory over an Anna Nikolayevna Antipova! She had simply arrested the Count just as he was driving up to her rival's house, and despite everything, including the arguments of Mozglyakov himself, who feared a scandal, had dumped the little old man into her own carriage. It was precisely because, in a critical situation, she was never stopped by fear of scandal, adopting as her axiom that success justifies any means, that Marya Alexandrovna rose above her rivals. The Count, of course, showed no particular resistance and, according to his wont, very soon forgot about everything, and was well pleased. During dinner he prattled incessantly, was extremely gay, perpetrating witticisms and puns, relating anecdotes which he never finished, or jumping from one subject to another without noticing that he had done so. He had drunk three glasses of champagne at Natalya Dmitriyevna's. During dinner he had had a few more, till he was completely fuddled. Marya Alexandrovna herself kept filling up his glass. The dinner was extremely good. That rogue Nikitka had not let them down. The hostess enlivened the company with the most charming courtesy. But everyone else was as dull as ditch-water, as if by general consent. Zena maintained a solemn silence. Mozglyakov, obviously ill at ease, ate little. He was plunged in meditation and since this did not often happen with him, Marya Alexandrovna felt great anxiety. Nastasya Petrovna was morose, even going so far as to make various furtive signs to Mozglyakov, who took no notice of them at all. But for the charmingly courteous hostess, the dinner would have been like a funeral!

Marya Alexandrovna was in a state of inexpressible perturbation. For one thing Zena, with her mournful air and eyes red with weeping, alarmed her exceedingly. And then there was another difficulty—the greatest hurry was necessary and that accursed Mozglyakov sat there like a block of wood, perfectly unperturbed, as if determined to be in the way. And how was she to begin the task she had in hand in his presence? Marya Alexandrovna rose from the table in terrible anxiety. What was her astonishment, her joyful trepidation, if one may say so, when Mozglyakov, as soon as everyone rose from the table, came up to her and declared quite unexpectedly that, needless to say to his great regret, he must leave immediately.

"Where are you going?" asked Marya Alexandrovna with exaggerated concern.

"You see, Marya Alexandrovna," began Mozglyakov, who seemed to be in a state of some confusion, "a very strange thing has happened to me. I don't know how to tell you . . . for God's sake give me your advice!"

"What? What is it?"

"I met my godfather Boroduyev, today. That merchant, you know. The old fellow is ever so angry, reproaching me, and telling me I have become proud. I've been in Mor-dasov three times without once going to see him. 'Come to tea today,' he says; it's exactly four now, and he drinks tea in the old-fashioned way, when he wakes up, between four and five. What am I to do? I know it's rude to leave you, Marya Alexandrovna, but just think—he saved my late father from suicide when he gambled away state funds. That's why they asked him to be my godfather. If my marriage with Zena comes off, I shall only have a hundred and fifty serfs. And he has a million, you know—even more, they say. And no children. If I keep on his good side he'll leave me a hundred thousand in his will. And he's seventy, you know!"

"Oh, heavens, then what are you thinking about, why do you delay?" cried Marya Alexandrovna, hardly able to conceal her joy. "Go at once! You can't trifle with that sort of thing! So that's why you were so absent-minded at dinner, I noticed it at once! Go, *mon ami*, go! You ought to have paid him a visit this morning, to show that you value, you appreciate his kindness. Ah, youth, heedless youth!"

"Why, Marya Alexandrovna!" exclaimed Mozglyakov in astonishment. "You yourself scolded me for not dropping him. Why, you said he was a muzhik, hand in glove with petty tradesmen and scriveners."

"Eh, *mon ami*! One says all sorts of thoughtless things! I, too, can be mistaken, I'm no saint. Not that I remember having said this, but in a passing mood I might have. . . . And don't forget you were not paying court to Zena then—of course it may be just my selfishness, but now I can't help regarding matters differently, and what mother will blame me in this case? Go, don't lose a moment! Stay with him all the evening—and listen—you might refer to me, quite casually, you know. Say I respect him, love him, esteem him, and do it cleverly, as best you can. Oh, heavens! It quite went out of my head! I should have suggested it to you myself!"

"You have brought me back to life, Marya Alexandrovna!" cried the ecstatic Mozglyakov. "I swear to you I'll obey you in everything now! And, fancy, I was simply afraid to tell you! Well, good-bye, I'll be off! Make my apologies to Zenaida Afanasyevna. Of course, I'll come straight back. . . ."

"Bless you, *mon ami*, and mind you mention me! He really is a darling old man. I have long changed my attitude to him. . . . I always appreciated in him something traditional, something truly Russian, absolutely genuine. *Au revoir, mon ami, au revoir!*"

"Oh, what a blessing to have got rid of him! Why, God himself is helping me!" she thought, panting with joy.

Pavel Alexandrovich went out into the hall and was just putting on his fur-coat when suddenly Nastasya Petrovna appeared as if from nowhere. She had been watching for him.

"Where are you off to?" she asked seizing his arm.

"To Boroduyev, Nastasya Petrovna! He's my godfather, he had the honour of standing for me at the font. . . . A rich old fellow, he'll leave me something. I must keep on his good side."

Pavel Alexandrovich was in the best of spirits.

"To Boroduyev! Then you can say good-bye to your bride," said Nastasya Petrovna harshly.

"What do you mean?"

"What I say. You thought she was yours already, did you? Well, now they're going to marry her to the Count. I heard it with my own ears."

"The Count! Spare me, Nastasya Petrovna!"

"Spare you! What for? Come on! Want to see and hear for yourself? Put down your coat and come with me!"

Pavel Alexandrovich, thunderstruck, put down his coat and followed Nastasya Petrovna on tiptoe. She led him to that same closet from which she had peeped and eaves-dropped in the morning.

"But what's it all about, Nastasya Petrovna? I don't understand a thing!"

"You'll understand if you bend down and listen. The comedy is probably just going to begin."

"What comedy?"

"Sh! Don't speak too loud! The comedy is that you are simply being fooled. As soon as you went away with the Count today, Marya Alexandrovna spent a whole hour persuading Zena to marry him, saying that nothing could be easier than to hoodwink him into marrying her! You

should have heard her—it made me almost sick. I heard everything from here. Zena agreed. And you should have heard the two of them abuse you! They simply regard you as a fool, and Zena said outright she wouldn't marry you for anything. And what a fool I was! I was going to pin on a red bow! Listen, just listen!"

"But that would be the basest treachery," whispered Pavel Alexandrovich, staring idiotically at Nastasya Petrovna.

"Just you listen, you'll hear still more wonderful things!"

"Where am I to listen?"

"Just bend down—to that little hole."

"But, Nastasya Petrovna, I am not capable of eavesdropping!"

"It's a bit late in the day to be thinking of that! You'll have to pocket your pride now, my dear! Since you're here, you may as well listen."

"Oh, but—"

"If you're incapable, then, don't mind being duped. There! You try to help him and he strikes an attitude! I don't care, I'm sure! It's not for myself. . . . I shall be gone by the evening!"

Pavel Alexandrovich, steeling his nerves, bent down to the chink. His heart was beating and there was a throbbing in his temples. He scarcely knew what he was doing.

CHAPTER VIII

"So you had a very amusing time at Natalya Dmitriyevna's, Count?" Marya Alexandrovna was saying, casting an avid glance over the field of the coming battle and desirous of opening the conversation in the most innocent manner possible. Her heart beat high with agitation and suspense.

After dinner the Count was immediately swept into the salon in which he had been received that morning. All the solemn occasions and receptions in Marya Alexandrovna's house took place in this salon. She was proud of this room. After his six glasses of wine, the old man felt pleasantly weak, and did not stand very firmly on his feet. But he prattled incessantly, even more than usual. Marya Alexandrovna knew this was a mere flash in the pan and that her guest, who was growing ever more heavy-headed, would soon long for sleep. The moment had to be used to advantage. Glancing over the field of the battle again, she noted with satisfaction that the amorous old fellow was leering at Zena with inexpressible pleasure, and her maternal heart beat joyfully.

"Very, very amusing," drawled the Count. "A marvellous woman, you know, a marvellous woman, that Natalya Dmitriyevna."

Absorbed in her great projects as Marya Alexandrovna was, such resounding praises of her rival were a knife in her heart.

"Come now, Count!" she cried, her eyes sparkling. "If your Natalya Dmitriyevna is a marvellous woman I really don't know what to say to you after that! After that you simply don't know the society here, you simply don't know! Why, she's nothing but a show of incredible virtues and noble emotions, just a comedy, a mere golden crust. Lift this crust and you will see a veritable inferno beneath the flowers. A veritable hornets' nest, where you would be devoured, and not a bone of you would be left."

"No, really?" exclaimed the Count. "You astonish me!"

"But I assure you it is so! Ah, *mon prince*! Listen, Zena, it is my bounden duty to tell the Count that ridiculous and disgraceful story about Natalya—last week, remember? Yes, Count—that very Natalya Dmitriyevna, that paragon you seem to admire so much. Oh, my dear Count! I swear I am no gossip, but I simply must tell

you, if only to make you laugh, to show you, through a magnifying glass, as it were, what the people here are really like. Two weeks ago this same Natalya Dmitriyevna came to see me. Coffee was served, and I had to leave the room for some reason or other. I remember perfectly how much sugar there was in the silver sugar-bowl, it was quite full. When I came back, what did I see—there were only three lumps on the very bottom! There was nobody else in the room but Natalya Dmitriyevna. What d'you think of that? She owns a stone-built house and has no end of money. It's a ridiculous, a comic incident, but it will give you some idea of the genteel ways of our society!"

"No, really!" exclaimed the Count in sincere astonishment. "But what an unnatural greed! D'you mean to say she ate it all herself?"

"Well, so there's your marvellous woman, Count! How do you like this disgraceful incident? Why, I think I should have died on the spot if I could have made up my mind to such a loathsome act!"

"Yes, yes . . . still, you know, she's such a *belle femme*."

"Natalya Dmitriyevna? Come now, Count—she's just a tub. Oh, Count, Count! That you should say such a thing! I expected more discrimination from you."

"Yes, yes—a tub. . . . But such a figure, you know . . . and then that little girl who danced—her figure, too—"

"Sonya? Why, she's a mere child, Count! She's only fourteen!"

"Yes . . . yes but she's so nimble, you know, and she has such . . . shapes . . . developing. Such a pet! And the other one who danced with her—she's developing, too."

"Oh, you probably mean that unfortunate orphan, Count! They often have her there!"

"An orphan! A dirty little thing, of course, she might at least wash her hands . . . but still . . . very alluring. . . ."

Saying this the Count with ever growing eagerness regarded Zena through his lorgnette.

"*Mais quelle charmante personne!*" he muttered under his breath, fairly melting with pleasure.

"Play us something, Zena . . . or no, sing! You should hear her sing, Count! You might call her a virtuoso, a regular virtuoso! And if you only knew, Count," Marya Alexandrovna continued in a low voice, when Zena had gone to the grand piano, with that sinuous, gliding gait which almost overwhelmed the poor old fellow, "if you only knew what a daughter she is! How she can love, how tender she is with me! What feelings, what a heart!"

"Yes, yes, feelings. . . . You know, the only woman I ever knew in all my life who could have compared with her in beauty," interrupted the Count, swallowing, "was the late Countess Nainskaya, she died thirty years ago. She was a marvellous woman, her beauty was indescribable, afterwards she married her chef."

"Her chef, Count?"

"Yes, yes, her chef . . . a Frenchman, abroad. She had him made a count while she was abroad. He was a very presentable person and remarkably well-read, he had a tiny little moustache."

"And . . . and . . . did they get on, Count?"

"Yes, yes, they got on very well. As a matter of fact, they separated soon after. He robbed her and left her. They quarrelled about some sauce, I think. . . ."

"What shall I play, Mamma?" asked Zena.

"You'd better sing to us, Zena. How she sings, Count! Are you fond of music?"

"Yes, yes, *charmant, charmant!* I love music. I used to know Beethoven when I was abroad."

"Beethoven! Fancy, Zena, the Count used to know Beethoven!" cried Marya Alexandrovna in ecstasy. "Oh, Count, did you really know Beethoven?"

"Yes, yes! We were quite intimate. There was always snuff on the end of his nose. He was so odd!"

"Beethoven?"

"Yes, yes, Beethoven. Perhaps it wasn't Beethoven, though, but some other German. There are so many Germans over there. But I think I've got mixed up—"

"What shall I sing, Mamma?" asked Zena.

"Oh, Zena! Sing that song with so much chivalry in it, the one about the chatelaine of the castle and her troubadour. Oh, Count, how I love everything chivalrous! Those castles! Oh, that medieval life! Those troubadours, heralds, tournaments. . . . I'll play your accompaniment, Zena. Come over here, Count, to be nearer. . . . Oh, those castles, oh, oh!"

"Yes, yes . . . castles. I like castles, too," murmured the Count enthusiastically, fixing his real eye on Zena. "But, oh heavens," he cried, "that song! Why, I know that song! I heard it long ago! It reminds me of—oh, heavens!"

I will not undertake to describe the effect of Zena's singing on the Count. She sang an old French ballad which was once very popular. Zena sang beautifully. Her pure, powerful contralto went straight to the heart. Her exquisite face, beautiful eyes, the divine tapering fingers with which she turned over the notes, her hair, thick, black, lustrous, her heaving bosom, her whole figure, proud, exquisite, noble, fairly bewitched the poor old man. He never took his eyes off her while she sang, and almost choked with emotion. His aged heart, warmed by the champagne, the music, and newly roused memories (and which of us has not some favourite memories?), beat faster and faster, as it had not beaten for a long time. . . . He was ready to sink on his knees before Zena, and by the time she stopped singing he was almost in tears.

"O, *ma charmante enfant!*" he cried, kissing her fingertips. "*Vous me ravissez!* It all comes back to me now. . . . But, but, oh, *ma charmante enfant!*—"

The Count was too deeply moved to complete the sentence.

Marya Alexandrovna felt that her moment had arrived.

"Why do you ruin yourself, Count?" she cried solemnly. "So much feeling, so much vitality, so much spiritual wealth, and to bury yourself in solitude for the rest of your life! To avoid your fellow mortals, your friends! But it's unpardonable! Think, Count! Regard life, so to say, with a clear orb! Recall to your heart the memories of your past—the memories of your golden youth, your golden, carefree days—revive them, revive yourself! Begin to live in society, among human beings, once more! Go abroad, to Italy, to Spain—Spain, Count! You need a guardian, a heart to love you, to respect you, to feel for you. But you have friends! Summon them, call to them, and they will come running to you in droves! I would be the first to leave everything and run to your summons. I remember our friendship, Count. I would leave my husband and follow you. . . . I would even, if I were younger, if I were as beautiful, as charming, as my daughter, I would be your companion, your friend, your wife, if you wished it."

"And I am sure you were *une charmante personne* in your day," said the Count, blowing his nose. His eyes were moist with tears.

"We live in our children, Count," replied Marya Alexandrovna with sublime feeling. "I, too, have my guardian angel, and it is she—my daughter, the friend of my thoughts, of my heart, my life, Count! She has already rejected seven offers, not wishing to be parted from me."

"And so she will accompany you when you go abroad with me? In that case I shall certainly go abroad!" cried the Count ecstatically. "I shall certainly do so. And if I ventured to flatter myself with the hope— But she is a charming, charming child! Oh, *ma charmante enfant!*"

And the Count again fell to kissing her fingers. The poor old thing was ready to fall on his knees before her.

"Oh Count, you ask if you can venture to flatter yourself with the hope!" put in Marya Alexandrovna feeling a fresh surge of eloquence. "How strange you are, Count! Do you really consider yourself unworthy of the attention of ladies? It is not youth that constitutes beauty. Remember you are, as it were, a relic of our aristocracy! You are the representative of the most refined, the most chivalrous feelings and manners. Did not Maria love the old Mazeppa? I remember reading that Lozien, that adorable marquis of the court of Louis . . . I forget which . . . won the heart of one of the first beauties at court when he was already advanced in years. And who told you you were old? Who taught you that? As if people like you ever get old! You with your wealth of feeling, thought, gaiety, wit, vitality, brilliant manners! You only have to appear abroad, at the waters somewhere, with a young wife, a beauty, for example like my Zena—I do not necessarily mean her, I only use her as an example—and you would see how enormous the effect would be. You, a relic of the aristocracy, she, a beauty of beauties. You lead her triumphantly by the hand, she sings before a brilliant company, you shower witticisms, and everyone flocks to see you. All Europe is talking about you, for all the newspapers, all the feuilletons in the place are full of you . . . ah, Count, dear Count! And you ask if you may flatter yourself with the hope!"

"Articles . . . yes, yes. They come out in the newspapers," mumbled the Count, only half understanding Marya Alexandrovna's prattle, and getting more and more sentimental. "But . . . my child, if you are not tired, sing that song again!"

"Oh, Count, she has other songs, still better. Do you remember *L'hirondelle*, Count? You've probably heard it?"

"I remember it, or rather, I have forgotten it. No, no, the same song, the one she just sang. I don't want *L'hirondelle*! I want that song!" pleaded the Count childishly.

Zena sang the song again. The Count could not restrain himself, and fell on his knees at her feet. He was weeping.

"O, *ma belle châtelaine*!" he cried in a voice trembling with age and agitation. "O, *ma charmante châtelaine*! Oh, my sweet child! You remind me of things long past. I used to think things would be better than they turned out to be. I used to sing duets—with the Viscountess—that very song—and now— Now, I don't know—"

The Count gasped and choked as he brought out all these utterances.

His tongue was evidently becoming numb. It was almost impossible to understand some of his words. The only thing that was clear was that he was violently moved. Marya Alexandrovna hastened to pour oil on the flames.

"Now, Count, I'm afraid you'll be falling in love with my Zena!" she cried, feeling that the moment was a solemn one.

The Count's reply surpassed her highest expectations.

"I am madly in love with her!" cried the old man, suddenly galvanized into new life, still on his knees, and still trembling with emotion. "I am ready to give my life for her! And if I could only hope . . . help me to get up, I am rather weak . . . I . . . if I could only venture to offer her my heart, I . . . she would sing to me every day, and I would look at her . . . look at her all the time . . . oh, heavens!"

"Count! You offer her your hand! You want to take her from me, my Zena, my dear one, my angel, Zena! But I will not let you go, Zena! They will have to tear her from

my arms, from a mother's arms!" Marya Alexandrovna fell on her daughter's neck and embraced her firmly, though she felt that she was being repulsed with equal firmness. She had overdone it a little. Zena felt this with her whole being, and regarded the comedy with inexpressible loathing. She did not say anything, however, and that was all Marya Alexandrovna asked.

"She has rejected nine offers, simply so as not to be separated from her mother!" she cried. "But this time—my heart has a presentiment of a parting. I saw her looking at you this morning—it's your air of *pur sang* that got her, Count, that refinement of yours. . . . Oh, you will separate us, I feel it!"

"I adore her," muttered the Count, still trembling like a leaf.

"So you will leave your mother!" exclaimed Marya Alexandrovna, once more falling on her daughter's neck.

Zena hastened to put an end to the embarrassing scene. Silently she extended to the Count her beautiful hand, even forcing herself to smile. The Count took this hand reverently and covered it with kisses.

"I am only beginning to live!" he muttered choking with emotion.

"Zena," said Marya Alexandrovna solemnly, "look at that man! He is the most honourable, the noblest of any I ever knew. He is a knight from the Middle Ages. But she knows it, Count, she knows, to my grief. . . . Oh, why did you come? I give you my treasure, my angel. Take care of her, Count! It is a mother who implores you, and what mother will blame me for my grief?"

"That'll do, Mamma," whispered Zena.

"You will shield her from injury, Count? Your sword will dazzle the eyes of any scandalmonger or insolent person daring to injure my Zena?"

"Enough, Mamma, do you want me to—"

"Yes, yes, dazzle," muttered the Count. "I have only begun to live—I want there to be a wedding now, this very moment! I—I want to send immediately to Dukhanovo. I have diamonds there. I want to place them at her feet."

"What ardour! What enthusiasm! What generosity!" exclaimed Marya Alexandrovna. "How could you, Count—how could you bring about your own ruin by shunning society? I will say it over and over again! I am beside myself when I think of that infernal—"

"What was I to do? I was so frightened!" muttered the Count whimpering, quite overcome. "They wanted to send me to a madhouse and I was so frightened."

"A madhouse? The monsters! The inhuman creatures! The low cunning! I heard of it, Count. Why, they must be mad themselves! What for, what for?"

"I don't know myself," replied the old man, sinking into a chair, so weak he was. "I know I was at some b-ball and told some s-s-story, and they d-d-didn't like it. And so there was a fuss!"

"And was that all, Count?"

"No. Afterwards I p-p-played cards with Count Pyotr D-d-dementich and I was six d-d-down! I had two k-k-kings and three queens . . . or perhaps it was three queens and two kings? No! It was one k-k-king! The k-k-queens came next."

"And that was all? A mere trifle! Oh, the infernal inhumanity! You weep, Count! But there shall be no more of this! I will be at your side now, Count. I will not part with Zena, and we'll see if they dare to utter a word! And you know what—your marriage will be a blow to them, Count! They will be covered with confusion. They will see that you can still . . . I mean they will realize that a beauty like Zena would not marry a madman! Now you can hold your head up. You will look them straight in the face—"

"Yes, yes, I will look them straight in the face," muttered the Count, closing his eyes.

"Oh dear, he's quite done up!" thought Marya Alexandrovna, "it's a mere waste of words!"

"You are nervous, Count, I can see that. You must calm down, you must really, you must rest from this excitement," she said, bending over him maternally.

"Yes, yes, I should like to lie down for a little," he said.

"That's right! Calm yourself, Count! All this excitement—wait, I will go with you. . . . I will put you to bed myself, if necessary. Why do you look at that picture so, Count! It's a portrait of my mother—an angel, not a woman. Oh, why is she not with us now? She was a saint, Count, a saint. I have no other word for her."

"A saint? *C'est joli*—I had a mother, too—*princesse*—and fancy, she was a frightfully fat woman. But that's not what I meant to say—I do feel rather weak. *Adieu, ma charmante enfant!* Today—tomorrow—with pleasure. Well, it's all the same—*au revoir, au revoir!*" Here he tried to wave his hand, but slipped and almost fell in the doorway.

"Careful, Count! Lean on my arm," cried Marya Alexandrovna.

"*Charmant, charmant!*" he muttered, going out of the room. "I am only beginning to live."

Zena was left alone. Her heart was indescribably heavy. She felt a disgust amounting to nausea. She was ready to despise herself. Her cheeks burned. She stood motionless with clenched hands, set teeth, and bowed head. Tears of shame rolled down her cheeks. . . . Just then the door opened and Mozglyakov burst into the room.

CHAPTER IX

He had heard everything!

He did not so much enter the room as propel himself into it, pale with agitation and fury. Zena stared at him in astonishment.

"So that's how it's to be, is it!" he cried, panting. "At last I see you as you really are!"

"As I am?" said Zena, staring at him as if she thought him mad, and suddenly her eyes blazed with anger.

"How dare you speak to me like that?" she cried, advancing upon him.

"I heard everything," said Mozglyakov solemnly, but he involuntarily retreated a step.

"You heard? You eavesdropped?" said Zena, looking at him scornfully.

"Yes! Eavesdropped! Yes, I stooped to such a base act, but at least I have discovered that you are the most—I can find no word for the sort of woman you have shown yourself to be!" he replied, visibly wilting beneath Zena's gaze.

"Well, and if you did hear, what can you accuse me of? What right have you to accuse me? What right have you to speak so insolently to me?"

"I, what right have I? And you can ask? You are going to marry the Count, and I have no right!... You gave me your word, that's why!"

"When?"

"And you can ask me when?"

"This very morning when you pressed me, I told you definitely I could not give you a definite answer yet."

"But you did not send me away, you did not absolutely reject me. It means you were holding me in reserve. It means you were leading me on."

A look of anguish, as from a piercing inner pain showed in Zena's face. But she overcame her feeling.

"If I did not drive you away," she replied, her voice clear and firm, though there was a just perceptible quiver in it, "it was simply from pity. You yourself implored me to take my time, not to be in a hurry, not to say no, to wait till I knew you better, and 'then,' you said, 'then, when you are satisfied that I am a high-minded person, perhaps you will not reject me.' Those were your own words in the very beginning of your courtship. You cannot go back on them! But you yourself saw my displeasure when I met you today, two weeks earlier than you had agreed to come, and this displeasure I made no attempt to conceal from you, on the contrary, I allowed you to see it. You noticed it yourself, for you asked me if I was angry with you for having returned so soon. A girl cannot be accused of encouraging a person for whom she cannot and will not even conceal her aversion. You dared to suggest that I was holding you in reserve. Very well, then, I will tell you exactly the way I thought of you: 'He may not have a superior mind, but perhaps he is a good-hearted man, and therefore a man one could bring oneself to marry.' But now, having, fortunately for myself, discovered that you are not only a fool, but an ill-natured fool, there is nothing left for me but to wish you the best of luck and a good journey. Good-bye!"

With these words, Zena turned away from him and walked slowly towards the door.

Mozglyakov, realizing that all was lost, fell into a frenzy of rage.

"Aha! So I'm a fool, am I?" he cried. "So now I'm a fool! Very well! Good-bye! But before I go I'll tell the whole town how you and your mamma between you bamboozled the Count—after first making him drunk! I'll tell everyone! You shall remember Mozglyakov!"

Zena started, halting as if to reply, but after a pause merely shrugged her shoulders contemptuously and went out, banging the door after her.

At that moment Marya Alexandrovna appeared in the doorway. She had heard Mozglyakov's exclamation, taken in the situation at a glance, and was trembling with fear. Mozglyakov had not yet gone, Mozglyakov was close to the Count, Mozglyakov would spread the tidings all over the town, and secrecy, if only for the very shortest time, was essential. Marya Alexandrovna had made her calculations. She ran over all the circumstances in the twinkling of an eye, and a scheme for conciliating Mozglyakov was already projected.

"What's the matter, *mon ami*?" she said going up to him and holding out her hand in a cordial manner.

"Oh, I'm your *ami*, am I?" he cried in a fury. "After what you have been up to, I'm still *mon ami*! Your servant, dear lady! And you think you can still hoodwink me!"

"I am sorry, very sorry, to find you in such an extraordinary state of mind, Pavel Alexandrovich. What expressions! You don't even consider it necessary to restrain yourself in front of a lady!"

"A lady! You—you! Call yourself anything you like, but a lady!" cried Mozglyakov. I do not know precisely what he wished to express by his words, but no doubt it was something extremely recriminatory.

Marya Alexandrovna looked gently into his face.

"Sit down," she said mournfully, pointing to the arm-chair in which a quarter of an hour before the Count had rested his limbs.

"But, Marya Alexandrovna," said the puzzled Mozglyakov, "you look at me as if it were not you who are to blame, but I who had offended you. Why, it's impossible! Such a tone! It's really more than human patience can endure, don't you know!"

"My friend," replied Marya Alexandrovna. "Allow me still to call you that, for you have no better friend than I. My friend! You suffer, you are in agony, you are wounded

in your best feelings, and so it is no wonder that you speak to me the way you do. But I am going to show you my whole heart, the more that I do feel myself to blame in your eyes, to a certain extent. Sit down and let us talk."

Marya Alexandrovna spoke in a voice of gentle grief, there was a look of suffering on her face. The astonished Mozglyakov sat down beside her in the armchair.

"Have you been eavesdropping?" she asked, looking at him reproachfully.

"Yes, I have! And a silly fool I would have been not to! At least I have discovered all your machinations against me," replied Mozglyakov rudely, his rage giving him courage and confidence.

"That *you*—you with your upbringing, with your principles, could stoop to such an act! Oh heavens!"

Mozglyakov fairly jumped.

"But, Marya Alexandrovna!" he shouted, "this is really going too far. Remember what you, with your principles, have stooped to—after that how can you dare to upbraid others!"

"Another thing I should like to know," she said, ignoring his exclamation, "is who put it into your head to eavesdrop, who told you, who has been playing the spy? Tell me that."

"Forgive me—that I shall not tell you."

"Good, I will find out for myself. I told you I felt guilty in your eyes, Paul. But if you look into everything, into all the circumstances you will see that even if I have been to blame it was for the sole reason that I wished you every kindness possible—"

"Me? Kindness? That really is a little *too* much! You won't hoodwink me any more, that I can assure you. The lad's not such a fool as he looks!"

And he threw himself back so violently that the chair creaked beneath him.

"Try to be a little cooler, my friend, if you can. Listen to me attentively, and you will be in full agreement with me. In the first place, I was going to explain everything to you myself, and you would have heard it all from me without stooping to eavesdrop. If I did not explain it to you in advance, today, it was simply because it was all still a mere project. It might not have come to anything.

"You see, I am being perfectly frank with you. In the second place, do not blame my daughter! She loves you to distraction, and it cost me incredible efforts to divert her from you and bring her to consider the Count's offer."

"I have just had the pleasure of receiving the fullest proof of her frantic love for me," said Mozglyakov ironically.

"Very well! And how did you speak to her? Is that the way a lover should speak? Is that the way, I ask you, a well-bred man should speak? You insulted and irritated her."

"I can't stop to think about manners, Marya Alexandrovna. And what about you both—smiling at me so sweetly just now, and the moment I turned my back and went away with the Count, covering me with abuse! You blackened me, that's what you did. I know everything, everything!"

"And from the same filthy source, no doubt," remarked Marya Alexandrovna, smiling scornfully. "Yes, Pavel Alexandrovich, I blackened you, I said bad things about you, and I admit I worked hard at it. But the very fact that I was forced to blacken you in her eyes, perhaps even to slander you, that fact alone shows how hard it was for me to drag out of her an agreement to throw you over! Silly man! If she had not loved you, should I have needed to blacken you, to show you in a ridiculous unworthy light, to have resort to such extreme measures? Oh, you don't know the half! Even now I had to use all my authority as a mother to tear you out of her heart and after incredible

efforts I gained only the most superficial consent. Since you heard what we said now, you must have noticed that she did not support me in front of the Count, with a single word, a single gesture. Throughout that scene she scarcely uttered a word: she sang quite mechanically. Her very being ached with grief and at last I had to take the Count away out of sheer pity for her—I'm sure she cried when she was left alone. When you came in, you must have observed her tears—"

Now that Marya Alexandrovna mentioned it, Mozglyakov remembered that Zena really had seemed to be weeping when he had burst into the room.

"But you—why were *you* against me, Marya Alexandrovna?" he cried. "Why did you blacken me, slander me—as you have just admitted you did?"

"Oh, that was different! If you had asked me properly, at the very first, you would long ago have had your answer. Yes, you are right. It was I and I alone who did all this. Don't drag Zena into it. And why did I do it? You ask. I reply—in the first place, for Zena. The Count is rich, distinguished, has connections, and in marrying him Zena would be making a brilliant match. And finally, if he were to die, and he will probably die very soon, for we are all more or less mortal, Zena would be a young widow, a countess, in the highest society, and, perhaps, extremely wealthy. Then she could marry whoever she liked, she could make a very rich marriage. But of course she would marry the one she loved, the one who had loved her before, the one whose heart she had torn by marrying the Count. Remorse alone would make her try to atone for her cruelty to the man who loved her before."

"Humph!" grunted Mozglyakov, gazing thoughtfully at his boots.

"In the second place, and on this, too, I will only touch lightly," continued Marya Alexandrovna, "because you may not be able to understand it. You read your Shakes-

peare, extracting all sorts of lofty sentiments from him, but in practice, though you are *very good*, you are too young still—and I am a mother, Pavel Alexandrovich! Listen to me: I am marrying Zena to the Count, partly for the Count's own sake, because I want to save him by this marriage. I have always loved that noble, that great-hearted, that chivalrously honourable old man. We were friends. The unfortunate man is in the talons of that infernal woman. She will drive him to the grave. God knows that I got Zena to agree to marry him simply by demonstrating to her the sacred nature of her self-sacrificing deed. She was dazzled by the loftiness of these feelings, by the charm of a good deed. There is a streak of chivalry in her nature, too. I made her see that it would be a highly Christian act to become the support, the consolation, the friend, the child, a beauty, an idol, for one who may perhaps only have a year to live. He would be surrounded in the last days of his life not by a loathsome woman, fear, and wretchedness, but by light, friendship, love. His last sunset days would seem like paradise to him. Is that selfishness, I would ask you? Isn't it more like the act of a sister of mercy?"

"So you . . . you did it simply for the Count's sake, by way of acting like a sister of mercy?" growled Mozglyakov ironically.

"I understand this question, too, Pavel Alexandrovich, it is easy to see through you. You think, perhaps, that the advantages to the Count are bound up in the most Jesuitical manner with personal advantage. Well, supposing this is true! Such calculations may have entered my mind—but I assure you, they were involuntary, not Jesuitical. I know you are astonished at such a frank admission, but I will only ask you one thing, Pavel Alexandrovich—do not drag Zena into this affair! She is as pure as a dove—she does not calculate, she can only love—my sweet child! If anyone made any calculations it was I, and I alone!

But first search your conscience in all severity, and tell me—who in my place would not calculate, considering the circumstances? We reckon our own advantage even in lofty matters, in our most disinterested affairs, without noticing that we do so involuntarily. Most people deceive themselves as a matter of course, convinced that they are acting from sheer nobility. I refuse to deceive myself—I admit that, despite the nobility of my aims, I did make calculations. But consider—is it in my own interests that I calculate? I need nothing, Pavel Alexandrovich! I have lived out my life. It was for her sake, for my dear one, for my child, that I stooped to such calculations—and what mother could blame me in the circumstances?”

Tears glittered in the eyes of Marya Alexandrovna. Pavel Alexandrovich blinked in helpless bewilderment as he listened to these frank avowals.

“Oh, of course, what mother...” he said at last. “You sing a very fine song, Marya Alexandrovna, but, but you did give me your word! And you did give me encouragement— And look at me now! Just think! What a foolish position mine is now!”

“But surely you don’t suppose I have not kept you in mind, *mon cher Paul*? On the contrary, in all these calculations there was an advantage for you, so enormous that it was the thought of this more than anything else which enabled me to go on with it all.”

“An advantage for me!” cried Mozglyakov, now quite dumbfounded. “How do you make that out?”

“Oh, heavens! Surely you cannot be so very simple-minded and short-sighted?” exclaimed Marya Alexandrovna, raising her eyes to the ceiling. “Oh, youth, youth! This is what comes of burying yourself in that Shakespeare, of dreaming, of imagining we live, when really we are only feeding our minds on those of others and taking their thoughts for our own. You ask, my good Pavel Alexandrovich, what the advantage to you would be? Allow

me for the sake of clarity to go back— Zena loves you, that is beyond all doubt. But I have observed that despite her obvious love, she cherishes a certain distrust of you, of your good feelings, your inclinations. I have observed that sometimes, as if deliberately, she restrains herself and is cold to you—the fruits of meditation and distrust. You must have noticed that yourself, Pavel Alexandrovich.”

“I have. This very day, in fact. . . . But what is all this leading up to, Marya Alexandrovna?”

“You see, you *have* noticed it! So I was not mistaken. There is in her a strange distrust of the consistency of your good intentions. I am a mother—surely I can divine the secrets of my own child’s heart! Try to imagine that instead of rushing into the room showering reproaches, I might even say abuse, instead of irritating, offending, insulting her—and she so pure, so beautiful, so proud—and thus involuntarily confirming her suspicions of your evil propensities . . . try to imagine how it would have been if you had received the news meekly, with tears of regret, of despair, if you like, but with lofty elevation of soul. . . .”

“Humph!”

“Do not interrupt me, Pavel Alexandrovich! I want to impress your mind with the whole picture as it really is! Supposing you had gone up to her and said: ‘Zenaida! I love you more than my life, but reasons of a family nature are separating us. I understand these reasons. They are for your happiness, and I cannot venture to oppose them. Zenaida! I forgive you. Be happy, if you can!’ and if you had then fixed your gaze on her—the gaze of a wounded deer, if you know what I mean—imagine all this and think of the effect these words would have produced on her heart!”

“Very well, Marya Alexandrovna, I grant all that. I

understand you—but supposing I said this, and just the same was sent away with a flea in my ear?”

“No, no, no, my friend! Don’t interrupt me! I must show you the whole situation, with all its consequences, to make you see its grandeur. Try to imagine coming across her, years later, in high society. You meet her at a ball, in brilliantly lighted rooms, to the accompaniment of exquisite music, amidst marvellous women; and among all these rejoicings, you alone, melancholy, pensive, pale, stand leaning against a column (but where you can be seen), following her with your eyes through the mazes of the dance. She dances. Around you stream the exquisite melodies of Strauss, the *bons mots* of high society—but you alone are pale, burdened by your passion. What do you think Zena will feel then? With what eyes will she gaze on you? ‘And I could doubt this man who has sacrificed all for me,’ she thinks. ‘Whose heart has been broken for my sake!’ Naturally the old love would awake in her with irresistible force!”

Marya Alexandrovna paused for breath. Mozglyakov again moved so violently in his chair that it cracked beneath his weight. Marya Alexandrovna went on.

“For the sake of the Count’s health Zena will go abroad, to Italy, to Spain—Spain where there are myrtles, lemon-groves, a blue sky, the Guadalquivir; the country of love, where it is impossible to live and not to love. Where there are roses, and where kisses, so to speak, are in the very air. You, too, will go there, after her; you will sacrifice your career, your connections, everything! There your love will spring into being with irrepressible force: love, youth, Spain—oh, heavens! Your love is, of course, pure, holy, but you gaze, languishing, into each other’s eyes. You understand me, *mon ami*. Of course, there will be base, cunning folk, monsters, who will declare that it was by no means the feelings of a relative for an ailing old man which brought you abroad. I have purposely called your

love pure, because such people will certainly put quite a different interpretation on it. But I am a mother, Pavel Alexandrovich, you must not expect me to urge you to do what is wrong. Of course, the Count will not be in a state to keep a watch on you both, but what of that? Is that grounds for base slander? At last he dies, blessing his fate. Tell me—whom is Zena likely to marry then, if not you? You are such a distant relation of the Count's that there can be no obstacles to marriage. You will take her, young, rich, distinguished—and at what a time! At a time when the most distinguished of the *beau monde* would be proud to marry her! Through her influence you will be at home in the highest circles, and all of a sudden you will obtain some important post, and gain promotion. At present you only have a hundred and fifty serfs, but then you will be rich. The Count will see to that in his will, I will answer for that. And last and most important of all, she will have perfect confidence in you, in your heart, in your feelings, and you will suddenly become for her the embodiment of virtue and self-sacrifice. And you ask where your advantage comes in! Why, you would need to be blind not to see, not to realize, not to appreciate this advantage when it is a mere few steps ahead of you, facing you, smiling at you, crying: 'Here am I, your advantage!' Pavel Alexandrovich, oh, Pavel Alexandrovich!"

"Marya Alexandrovna!" cried Mozglyakov, moved beyond measure. "I understand it all, now! I have been a beast, a coarse, contemptible beast!"

He jumped up and clutched at his hair.

"You have been injudicious!" added Marya Alexandrovna. "That's it—very injudicious."

"I'm an ass, Marya Alexandrovna!" he cried, almost in despair. "All is lost now, and just because I loved her so madly!"

"Perhaps all is not lost," said Madame Moskaleva softly, as if pondering.

"Oh, if that were possible! Help me! Tell me what to do! Save me!"

And Mozglyakov wept.

"My friend," murmured Marya Alexandrovna pityingly, giving him her hand. "You were excited, overwrought by the violence of your passion, it was your very love which made you behave as you did. You hardly knew what you were doing. She can be made to see that!"

"I love her madly, I am ready to sacrifice everything for her!" cried Mozglyakov.

"Look here! I will put you right in her eyes—"

"Oh, Marya Alexandrovna!"

"Yes, I undertake to do this! I will bring you to her. You will tell her all—just as I have explained it to you."

"Oh! How kind you are, Marya Alexandrovna! But—can't it be done immediately, this minute?"

"God forbid! How inexperienced you are, my friend! She is so proud! She would regard it as a fresh insult, an affront! I'll arrange it all tomorrow. Go away now—to that merchant if you like—you can come back again this evening. On reflection, however, I don't think it would be advisable."

"I'll go! I'll go! Oh, heavens! You have brought me back to life! But there is one other question—supposing after all the Count doesn't die so soon?"

"Oh, heavens, how naïve you are, *mon cher Paul*! Why, we must pray to God for his health. We must wish long life to this dear, this good, this chivalrously honourable old man with all our hearts. I shall be the first to pray day and night, with tears in my eyes, for my daughter's happiness. But, alas, it seems the Count's health is very poor! And now that he will have to visit the metropolis, to take Zena out into society, I fear, oh, I fear, this may be the finishing touch for him! But—we will pray, *cher Paul*, and the rest is in the hands of the Lord! Must you go? Bless

you, *mon ami*! Hope, endure, be brave—above all, be brave! I have never doubted the nobility of your feelings—”

She pressed his hand warmly and Mozglyakov tiptoed out of the room.

“Well, I’ve got rid of one fool!” she said to herself triumphantly. “Now for the others.”

The door opened, and Zena came in. She was even paler than usual. Her eyes gleamed.

“Mamma,” she said, “get it over quickly, or I shan’t be able to hold out! It’s all so filthy, so base, that I am ready to run away. Do not wear me out, do not irritate me! I feel sick, do you hear, all this filth is making me sick!”

“Zena! What’s the matter with you, my love? Have you been—eavesdropping?” cried Marya Alexandrovna, darting a penetrating anxious glance at Zena.

“Yes, I have. Perhaps you would like to cry shame on me, as you did on that fool! Now listen—I swear that if you continue to torture me and make me play all sorts of base roles in this base comedy, I will throw it all up and put an end to it with a single stroke. Let it suffice for you that I have agreed to the principal business . . . I did not know myself! I am being suffocated by this stench! . . .”

And out she went, banging the door behind her.

Marya Alexandrovna followed her with a steady gaze, and plunged into meditation for a few moments.

“I must hurry!” she exclaimed, suddenly coming to life. “The chief danger lies in her, the greatest risk, and if all those beasts set upon us, spread it all through the town—which they have undoubtedly already done—all is lost! She will not be able to endure the scandal, she will back out. The Count must at all costs, and immediately, be taken to the country! I’ll rush there myself first, get hold of my blockhead, and bring him here. After all, he must be good for something. And by the time I get back the Count will have had his sleep out, and we’ll be off!”

She rang the bell.

"Is the carriage ready?" she asked the man who entered.

"It's been ready a long time," replied the footman.

The carriage had been ordered the moment Marya Alexandrovna had led the Count upstairs.

She dressed for going out after first running into Zena's room to tell her in outline her decision and give her certain instructions. But Zena did not even hear her. She was lying on her bed, her face buried in the pillows. Tears streamed down her cheeks and she was tearing at her beautiful long hair with her white hands, her arms bare to the elbow. Every now and then she shivered as if overcome by a sudden chill. Marya Alexandrovna began speaking, but Zena did not so much as raise her head.

After standing over her for a few moments Marya Alexandrovna went away disconcerted, as if to make up for the delay by action, got into her carriage, and ordered the coachman to whip up the horses.

"Too bad she heard," she said to herself as she took her seat in the carriage. "I used almost the same words to persuade Mozglyakov as I did with her. She is proud and she may have felt humiliated. H'm! The great thing now is to manage everything before they begin to smell a rat. Oh dear, supposing that fool of mine, just to spite me, is not at home!"

The very thought of this sent her into a fit of rage which augured little good for Afanasy Matveich. She tossed impatiently in her seat. The horses carried her forward at full speed.

CHAPTER X

The carriage sped on. We have already remarked that, quite early in the day, while she was chasing the Count through the streets of the town, a brilliant idea had flashed

into Marya Alexandrovna's mind. We promised to refer to this idea when the time came. But the reader already knows all about it. Marya Alexandrovna's idea was to capture the Count and carry him with the utmost possible speed to the village in which the all-unconscious Afanasy Matveich was spending a carefree existence. We will not attempt to conceal the fact that a certain inexplicable anxiety was growing upon Marya Alexandrovna. This happens even to real heroes, and at the very moment when they are about to achieve their goal. An instinct told her that it was dangerous to stay in Mordasov. "But once I am in the country," she reasoned, "the whole town can stand on its head for all I care!"

There was no time to waste in the country, either. Anything might happen, anything, although we by no means believe the rumours subsequently spread by my heroine's ill-wishers that she actually feared the intervention of the police at this moment. To be brief, she realized that the wedding of Zena and the Count must be celebrated as soon as possible. The village priest could easily perform the rites in her home. The wedding could be solemnized the day after tomorrow—tomorrow even, in an emergency. Weddings had been got up at two hours' notice before now. The Count could be made to regard this haste, the absence of all celebrations, negotiations, and receptions, as essential to *comme il faut*. He could be persuaded that it would be more correct, more elegant. If necessary the whole thing could be presented in the light of a romantic adventure, thus striking the most sensitive chord in the Count's heart. As a last resort he could even be made drunk or, still better, kept in a fuddled state. And then, come what might, Zena would be a countess. If a scandal were inevitable—in Petersburg or Moscow, say, where the Count had relatives—Marya Alexandrovna consoled herself by reflecting in the first place that it had not broken out yet, and in the second place, that very little was achieved in

the highest society without some scandal, especially in matrimonial affairs. That this was actually chic, since she visualized a scandal in high society, as probably something quite special, something spectacular, as in *Monte Cristo*, or *Les Memoires du Diable*. She was sure, too, that Zena had only to appear in society, supported by her mamma, for everyone without exception to be instantaneously conquered and that none of those countesses and princesses either in single combat or *en masse* would be able to withstand the drubbing *à la* Mordasov which Marya Alexandrovna alone knew how to inflict. It was all these considerations that were making Marya Alexandrovna hasten to her estate to fetch Afanasy Matveich, whose presence was indispensable to the success of her plans. For if it were suggested that the Count should go to the country for the sake of meeting Afanasy Matveich, he might decline this pleasure, whereas if the invitation came from Afanasy Matveich himself, the matter would bear quite a different aspect. And then the appearance of the elderly, distinguished paterfamilias, in white tie and frock-coat, hat in hand, coming purposely from afar at the first rumours of the Count's arrival might produce an extremely desirable effect, might even flatter the Count's vanity. It would be hard to refuse so pressing and solemn an invitation, thought Marya Alexandrovna. At last the carriage covered the final mile or two and the coachman Sofron reined in his steeds before the porch of a long, one-storey wooden building, somewhat dilapidated and dark with age, with a long row of windows, and ancient lime-trees all round it. This was the country-house and summer residence of Marya Alexandrovna. Lights could be seen in the windows.

"Where's that blockhead?" shouted Marya Alexandrovna, crashing like a hurricane into the rooms. "What's this towel doing here? Aha! He's been drying himself! Been in the bathhouse again? And swilling tea as usual! What

are you glaring at me for, imbecile? Why hasn't his hair been cut? Grishka! Grishka! Grishka! Why haven't you cut the master's hair, as I told you to last week?"

Marya Alexandrovna on entering the house had intended to greet Afanasy Matveich much more gently, but on discovering that he had just come from the bathhouse and was sipping his tea with enjoyment, she could not repress her bitter indignation. Now really—so much fuss and worry on her part, and so much blissful quietism on the part of that useless, utterly unpractical Afanasy Matveich! The contrast stung her to the quick. Meanwhile the blockhead, or, since we wish to be polite, he who had been thus designated, was sitting beside the samovar, his mouth open, his eyes bulging in imbecile fear, staring at his wife as if petrified by the sight of her. The sleepy, clumsy figure of Grishka hovered in the doorway, where he stood blinking at the scene before him.

"He won't let me, that's why I didn't cut his hair," he growled huskily. "I keep going up to him with the scissors—the mistress will be here any minute, I says, and we'll both catch it, and then what shall we do? Wait, he says, I'll have it waved for Sunday. I just want my hair to grow a little longer."

"What! He has his hair waved! So you thought you'd have your hair waved while I was away? What next, I wonder! And do you think it would suit your silly head! Heavens, what a mess! What's that smell? I ask you, monster, what's that smell?" cried the wife, advancing closer and closer upon the innocent Afanasy Matveich, by now completely dumbfounded.

"My—my—dear," muttered the intimidated husband, gazing imploringly at his tyrant, without rising from his seat.

"How often have I tried to knock it into your silly head that I'm not your dear, you ass? Your dear, indeed, you pigmy! How dare you call a gentlewoman whose place

is in high society and not beside an ass like you, by that name?"

"But, Marya Alexandrovna, you're my legal spouse, aren't you? It's—er—conjugal, you know," stammered Afanasy Matveich, raising both his hands to his head to protect his hair.

"Oh you, with your ugly phiz! You block of wood! Legal spouse! Who talks about legal spouses nowadays? I never heard such an idiotic answer! Imagine using that low disgusting word 'legal' in high society! And how dare you remind me I'm your wife, when I am always trying to do my best to forget it! What are you covering your head with your hands for? Just look at his hair! Soaking wet! It won't dry for another three hours! How am I to take him? How am I to show him before people? What shall I do?"

Marya Alexandrovna wrung her hands in her rage, rushing up and down the room. The disaster was of course not a very great one and not irretrievable. But Marya Alexandrovna could not control her overmastering spirit of tyranny. She felt the need for perpetually pouring out the vials of her wrath upon Afanasy Matveich, for tyranny is a habit which creates an insatiable craving. Moreover, everyone knows the strange contrasts of behaviour to which refined ladies from certain circles yield in privacy, and it is just these contrasts which I have desired to demonstrate. Afanasy Matveich followed the evolutions of his wife nervously, actually perspiring as he watched her.

"Grishka!" she shouted. "Dress your master at once! Frock-coat, trousers, white tie, waistcoat—look alive! Where's his hair-brush, where is it?"

"But I've just come from the bathhouse, my dear! I might catch cold if I went to town."

"Nonsense!"

"But my hair is wet—"

"We'll soon get it dry! Grishka, fetch the hair-brush and brush his hair till it's dry. Harder! Harder! That's the way!"

Thus encouraged, the zealous and devoted Grishka banged away at his master's hair, holding him by the shoulder for greater convenience, and pushing him still lower on the sofa. Afanasy Matveich winced and came near to tears.

"Come here now! Get him up, Grishka! Where's the pomatum? Bend over, bend over, you good-for-nothing, bend over, parasite!"

And Marya Alexandrovna began anointing her husband's hair with her own hands, pitilessly scrubbing the thick grizzled locks, which Afanasy Matveich could now wish had been cut. The sufferer snorted and panted, but made no sound, and endured the operation patiently.

"You drink my blood like a vampire, you dirty thing!" said his wife. "Now then—bend over!"

"Drink your blood, my dear?" mumbled her spouse, bending his head with all his might.

"Blockhead! Can't understand an allegory! Now comb your hair; and you there, dress him and be quick about it!"

Our heroine seated herself in an easy chair to keep an inquisitorial eye on the robing of Afanasy Matveich. By now he had somewhat recovered and was pulling himself together, and when it came to tying the white tie he even ventured to express an opinion of his own as to the form and beauty of the knot. By the time he had on his frock-coat the worthy gentleman had quite cheered up and looked at himself in the mirror not without complacency.

"Where are you taking me, Marya Alexandrovna?" he said, bristling.

Marya Alexandrovna could hardly believe her ears.

"Just listen to that! You mummy, you! How dare you ask me where I'm taking you!"

"But, my dear, I should like to know!"

"Silence! Just you call me 'my dear' again, especially where we're going now! You'll go without tea a whole month."

The terrified husband held his tongue.

"Ugh, you haven't got a single cross, you!" she went on, looking scornfully at Afanasy Matveich's black frock-coat.

This was too much for Afanasy Matveich.

"It's the chief who awards crosses, my dear," he said, "and I'm a councillor and not a muzhik," he added, in a spurt of heroic indignation.

"What? What? You've learned to argue, have you? You muzhik, you! Oh, you cur! A good thing I have no time to bother with you or I'd—well, we'll see about that later! Give him his hat, Grishka! Give him his overcoat! And while I'm away, turn out all these three rooms, yes, and set the green corner room in order, too. Get to work with the broom this minute! Take the slip-covers off the mirrors and the clocks, and have everything ready in an hour's time. And put on a frock-coat yourself, and give out gloves to the other servants. D'you hear me, Grishka, d'you hear me?"

They got into the carriage. Afanasy Matveich could only marvel. Meanwhile Marya Alexandrovna was asking herself how she was to get a clear understanding into her husband's head as to certain instructions necessary in his present position. But her husband forestalled her, breaking their mutual silence as follows:

"I had such an original dream last night, Marya Alexandrovna!"

"Ugh, accursed mummy! I thought you were going to say something important! You and your dreams! How dare you disturb me with your muzhik's dreams! Original! As if you understood what original means! Listen to me, I'm telling you for the last time, if you dare to say a word

about that dream or anything else when we get home, I'll—I don't know what I'll do to you! Now listen—Count K. has come to stay with me. Remember Count K.?"

"Yes, I remember him. What made him come?"

"Silence! It's none of your business. You must, like a courteous host, invite him to the country at once. That's what I'm taking you for. We'll get into the carriage and go back this very day. But if you dare to say a single word the whole evening, or tomorrow or the day after or any time whatever, I'll send you out to herd the geese for a whole year! You are to say nothing, not a single word. That's your only duty—understand?"

"And supposing someone asks me something?"

"Say nothing just the same."

"But I can't say nothing all the time, Marya Alexandrovna!"

"Well, answer in a monosyllable—for example, ahem! or something of the sort, to show you are a clever man and think before you speak."

"Ahem!"

"Now, just try and understand! I am taking you because you have heard of the Count's arrival and, delighted by his visit, have flown to pay your respects, and invite him to the country. Do you understand?"

"Ahem!"

"Don't start ahemming now, fool! You can answer me!"

"Very well, my dear, I will do just as you say, but why am I to invite the Count?"

"What's that? Arguing again? What's it to do with you? How dare you ask?"

"Why, I only wanted to know, Marya Alexandrovna—how am I to invite him if I'm not to say anything?"

"I'll speak for you and you only bow, d'you hear, only bow, and hold your hat in your hands—understand?"

"I understand, my dear—I mean, Marya Alexandrovna."

"The Count is remarkably witty. If he says anything, even if it's not to you, you reply to everything with a bright, good-humoured smile, d'you hear?"

"Ahem!"

"Again ahemming! Don't ahem at me! Answer me straight out, quite simply—did you hear me or not?"

"I heard you, Marya Alexandrovna, I heard you. How could I help it? And I'm only ahemming for practice, as you told me. But I can't help wondering how will it be if the Count says anything—am I just to look at him and smile? And if, after all, he asks me something?"

"What an idiot! I've told you already—say nothing. I'll answer for you, you only have to look and to smile."

"But he'll think I'm dumb," objected Afanasy Matveich.

"Well, and if he does? Let him think what he likes—at least you'll hide the fact that you're a fool."

"Ahem, well, and if other people ask me anything?"

"Nobody will ask you, there won't be anyone, and if, which God forbid, anyone should come, if anyone should ask you anything, or say anything, reply immediately with a sarcastic smile. Do you know what a sarcastic smile is?"

"It means witty, doesn't it?"

"I'll give you witty, you blockhead! As if anyone expects wit from you! A mocking smile, d'you understand—mocking and scornful."

"Ahem!"

"Oh, that fool! He'll let me down!" Marya Alexandrovna whispered to herself. "He's absolutely determined to suck my blood! I suppose I ought not to have brought him after all!"

Thus, meditating, fretting, and fuming, Marya Alexandrovna kept looking out of the carriage window and urging the coachman on. The horses flew, but the pace seemed slow to her. Afanasy Matveich sat silent in his corner,

mentally repeating his lesson. At last the carriage entered the streets of the town and drew up in front of Marya Alexandrovna's house. But our heroine hardly had time to leap out on to the steps when she saw a two-horse hooded sleigh with seats for two, the very sleigh in which Anna Nikolayevna Antipova usually went driving. There were two ladies in it. One of them was, of course, Anna Nikolayevna herself, and the other was Natalya Dmitriyevna, who had recently become her intimate friend and disciple. Marya Alexandrovna's heart sank, but she hardly had time to exclaim when another vehicle, a closed sleigh, evidently containing some other visitor, approached. Joyful exclamations were heard:

"Marya Alexandrovna! And with Afanasy Matveich, too! You here! Where d'you come from? How nice, we've come to you for the whole evening! What a surprise!"

The visitors leaped on to the steps of the porch twittering like swallows. Marya Alexandrovna could hardly believe her eyes and ears.

"A curse upon them!" she thought. "There's some plot here! I must look into it. Oh, you won't outwit me, you magpies—just wait!"

CHAPTER XI

Mozglyakov left Marya Alexandrovna, to all appearances completely consoled. She had quite inspired him. He did not go to Boroduyev, feeling the need of solitude. The flood of heroic and romantic dreams surging within him gave him no peace. He dreamed of a solemn scene with Zena, then of noble tears welling up from his all-forgiving heart, his pallor and despair at the brilliant Petersburg ball, Spain, the Guadalquivir, love, the dying Count joining their hands on his deathbed. Then, a beauty for his wife, devoted to him and ever marvelling at his

heroism and refined feelings. And at the same time, on the quiet, the attentions of some countess from the high society he was sure to enter after his marriage with Zena, the widow of Count K., and then a vice-governorship, money—in a word, all that Marya Alexandrovna had painted in such vivid colours, once more surged through his complacent mind, caressing it, alluring it, and above all flattering his vanity. And yet, and I hardly know how to account for this, as soon as he began to weary of all this ecstasy, he was assailed by the galling thought that all this was, as it were, in the future, and that his present situation was after all a ridiculous one. When this thought came to him he realized that he had wandered a long way away, and come to the suburbs of Mordasov, lonely and unfamiliar. It was getting dark. And in the streets, lined with small houses which seemed to have almost sunk into the earth, some of those dogs which multiply so alarmingly in provincial towns, precisely in those districts in which there is nothing to guard and nothing to steal, started barking furiously. Snow was beginning to fall in moist flakes. Every now and then a belated tradesman or a woman in a sheepskin coat and high boots passed by. All this, for some unknown reason, began to annoy Pavel Alexandrovich—a dangerous symptom, for when things are going well, everything appears to us in the most alluring and rainbow colours. Pavel Alexandrovich could not help remembering that up till now it had been he who had set the tone in Mordasov. He had enjoyed hearing it hinted everywhere he went that he was a good *parti*, and the congratulations that went with this. He had been quite proud of being a good *parti*. And all of a sudden he must appear in front of everyone as a rejected suitor. Everyone would laugh at him. After all he could not very well explain how things really stood with him, or talk about Petersburg balls and columns and the Guadalquivir. Pondering, fretting, and grieving, he at last chanced

upon the idea which had long been vaguely haunting him: supposing it's all lies, supposing it doesn't turn out in the way Marya Alexandrovna had so picturesquely described! He could not dismiss the recollection that Marya Alexandrovna was very deep, that, however worthy of universal respect she might be, she was nevertheless a gossip, and lied from morning to night . . . that she had probably her own particular reasons for getting rid of him just now, and that, after all, it doesn't take much ingenuity to paint an alluring picture. He thought of Zena, too, remembering a farewell glance which had by no means suggested a secret passion for him. And this brought him to the recollection that, whatever might be going to happen, an hour ago he had had to stand by and hear her call him a fool. This recollection brought his meditations to a standstill, and a flush of humiliation spread over his face, almost bringing tears to his eyes. To crown all, the next moment something most unpleasant occurred—he missed his footing and fell from the plank walk into a snow-drift. While he was floundering in the snow a pack of dogs which had long been pursuing him with their barks attacked him from all sides. One of them, the smallest and most aggressive, hung on to him, seizing the hem of his coat between its teeth. Beating off the dogs, swearing loudly, and cursing his fate, Pavel Alexandrovich, with a torn coat and intolerable melancholy in his soul, at last made his way to the corner of the street, and only then noticed that he had lost his way. It is well known that a man wandering about in an unfamiliar part of the town, especially at night, is incapable of walking straight down a street, and is for ever being drawn by some invisible force to take every side street he comes across. By adhering to this system, Pavel Alexandrovich lost his way completely. "To hell with all these lofty ideas!" he said to himself, and spat with rage. "The devil take you all, with your refined feelings and Guadalquivirs!" I will

not say that Mozglyakov was attractive at that moment. At last, tired, exhausted, having strayed for two hours, he got back to the porch in front of Marya Alexandrovna's house. He was astonished to see there numbers of carriages. "Can it be they have visitors, that they are having a party?" he asked himself. "What could be the object?" After eliciting from a servant who came to meet him, that Marya Alexandrovna had been to the country and brought back Afanasy Matveich in a white tie, and that the Count had waked up, but had not yet come downstairs, Pavel Alexandrovich went straight up to his uncle's room without a word. He had arrived at the stage when a weak man becomes capable of resolving on the most terrible, cruel, and dastardly action for the sake of revenge, without considering that he may perhaps have to repent of it for the rest of his life.

Upstairs he found the Count seated in an easy chair in front of his travelling case, with a completely bald head, but with his pointed beard and whiskers already affixed. His wig was in the hands of a grey-haired aged valet, a great favourite of his master—Ivan Pakhomich. Pakhomich was combing the wig with an air of profound respect. As for the Count himself, he presented a most pitiable spectacle, not having yet recovered from his recent drinking bout. He sat huddled up, blinking, crumpled, tearful, and he looked at Mozglyakov as if he did not know who he was.

"How are you, Uncle?" asked Mozglyakov.

"Oh ... it's you!" said his uncle after a pause. "Why, I've had a little nap, brother. Oh, heavens!" he shrieked, galvanized into sudden life. "I have no ... wig on!"

"Never mind, Uncle, I—I'll help you if you like."

"Ah, now you have discovered my secret! I *said* the door ought to be locked. Well, my friend, you must give me your word of honour this instant that you will make

no use of my secret and will never tell anyone that I have false hair."

"Why, Uncle, of course I won't! Surely you don't think me capable of such baseness!" cried Mozglyakov, anxious to conciliate the old man . . . from ulterior motives.

"Yes, yes! And since I see you are a noble fellow, so be it. I will astonish you, I will reveal all my secrets to you. How d'you like my moustache, dear boy?"

"Splendid, Uncle, splendid! How is it it has lasted so long?"

"Undeceive yourself, my friend, it is false," said the Count, looking triumphantly at Pavel Alexandrovich.

"No, really? It's hard to believe that. And your whiskers? You probably dye them, Uncle, admit it!"

"Dye them? Not only do I not dye them, but they are absolutely artificial."

"Artificial? No, Uncle, you can say what you like, but I don't believe you. You must be laughing at me!"

"*Parole d'honneur, mon ami!*" exclaimed the triumphant Count. "And do you know everyone, absolutely everyone, is taken in like you! Even Stepanida Matveyevna doesn't believe it, though she sometimes fixes them herself. But I am sure, my friend, you will keep my secrets. Give me your word of honour—"

"My word of honour, I will, Uncle; I repeat—surely you don't think me capable of such baseness?"

"Oh, my friend! What a fall I had today when you weren't there! Feofil turned me out of the carriage again."

"Again? When was that?"

"We had almost got to the monastery—"

"I know, Uncle, it was this morning."

"No, no, only two hours ago, not more. I was driving up to the monastery and all of a sudden he turned me out. I was terrified—and I still don't feel myself."

"Why, Uncle, you've been asleep!" said Mozglyakov in astonishment.

"Yes, yes, asleep . . . but afterwards I went out, and, and—perhaps—I—oh, how strange it all is!"

"I assure you, Uncle, you've been dreaming. You've been quietly sleeping the whole afternoon."

"Have I?" and the Count tried to think it over. "Why, yes, perhaps it really was a dream. But you know I remember everything I dreamed. First I dreamed about a dreadful bull with horns. And then I dreamed of a district attorney, and he had horns, too—"

"That was probably Nikolai Vasilich Antipov, Uncle?"

"Why, yes, perhaps it was. And then I saw Napoleon Buonaparte. You know, my dear fellow, everyone says I'm like Napoleon Buonaparte. But in profile I'm strikingly like one of the old popes! What do you think, my dear friend, am I like a pope?"

"I think you're more like Napoleon, Uncle!"

"Yes, yes, *en face*, of course! Still I quite agree with you, my dear fellow. I dreamed of him, when he was confined to that island, and he talked such a lot, was such a flibbertigibbet, that I was most amused."

"Napoleon, d'you mean, Uncle?" said Pavel Alexandrovich, surveying his relative thoughtfully. A strange idea had flashed through his mind, an idea he was as yet unable to grasp entirely.

"Yes, yes, Napoleon. He and I discussed philosophy. And do you know, my friend, I'm really quite sorry the English treated him so severely. Of course, if they hadn't kept him chained up, he would have begun attacking people again. He was a desperate fellow! Still, it was a pity. I would never have done it. I would have put him on a desert island."

"Why a desert island?" asked Mozglyakov absently.

"Well, then, on a populated island, but only one with reasonable inhabitants. And I would have got up all sorts

of entertainments for him—the theatre, music, the ballet, and all on state funds. I would have let him walk about—under surveillance, of course, or he would have run away at once. There were some pastries he was very fond of. So I would have made pastries for him every day. I would have behaved like a father to him, you know. He would have repented I'm sure."

Mozglyakov bit his nails impatiently as he listened absent-mindedly to the prattle of the old man, who was still only half awake. He was dying to turn the conversation to marriage, why, he could not have said. A boundless rage was seething in his veins. Suddenly the old man gave a cry of astonishment.

"Oh, *mon ami*! I almost forgot to tell you. Fancy, I proposed today!"

"Proposed, Uncle?" cried Mozglyakov, roused from his thoughts.

"Yes, yes, proposed. Are you going, Pakhomich? Go on, then! *C'est une charmante personne*— But I admit, my dear fellow, I acted thoughtlessly. I only see it now. Oh, heavens!"

"But, Uncle, tell me, when did you propose?"

"I confess, my friend, I'm not quite sure when it was. Perhaps that was a dream, too. Oh, how very strange it all is. . . ."

Mozglyakov trembled with delight. Another idea flashed through his mind.

"And whom did you propose to, Uncle?" he said, with growing impatience.

"The daughter of the lady of the house, *mon ami—cette belle personne*. I have forgotten her name, by the way! But you see, *mon ami*, I simply can't marry. What am I to do about it?"

"Why, it would be the end of you, if you were to marry! But allow me to ask you another question, Uncle. Are you sure you really did propose?"

"Yes, yes, I'm sure I did."

"And supposing you just dreamed it, the way you dreamed you had a second fall!"

"Oh, heavens! Perhaps I really did dream it! I don't know how to show myself there now. Couldn't we somehow find out, on the quiet, you know, whether I proposed or not? You can imagine my situation now!"

"I'll tell you what, Uncle—in my opinion there's nothing to find out."

"What d'you mean?"

"I'm quite certain you just dreamed it."

"I think so myself, my dear fellow, especially as I often have dreams of that sort."

"There you are, Uncle! You know you drank a little at lunch, then at dinner, and. . . ."

"Yes, yes, my friend. Perhaps that's exactly how it all came about."

"And then, Uncle, however impassioned you may have been, surely you would not have made such an irrational proposal when you were awake. You seem to be a perfectly rational being, Uncle, and—"

"Yes, yes!"

"Just think what would happen if your relations who are not well disposed to you as it is, were to find out. . . ."

"Oh, dear!" exclaimed the terrified Count. "What do you think they would do?"

"Why, they would yell with one voice that you were out of your mind when you did it, that you were mad, that you must be put in a ward, that you have been tricked, and they would probably end by having you put into some asylum or other."

Mozglyakov knew how to frighten the old man.

"Oh, my God!" cried the Count, trembling like a leaf. "Would they really put me away?"

"So try to think, Uncle, could you really have made such an unreasonable proposa! in your waking hours?"

You know yourself what is to your advantage. I solemnly declare that it was all a dream."

"A dream, that's what it was, a dream!" echoed the terrified Count. "Oh, how well you have reasoned it out, my dear boy! I am grateful to you from the bottom of my heart for setting me right!"

"And I'm ever so glad, Uncle, that I met you today. Just fancy—but for me, you really might have confused everything, have supposed that you were betrothed and gone among them as a betrothed man! Just think how dangerous that would have been!"

"Yes, yes, very dangerous!"

"And don't forget (the girl is twenty-three already), no one wants to marry her, and all of a sudden you, rich, distinguished, appear as her betrothed. Why, they would catch at the idea immediately, and swear that you really were her fiancé and perhaps even marry you by force. And then they would probably reckon on your dying soon."

"No, really?"

"And only think, Uncle—a man with your qualities—"

"Yes, yes, with my qualities—"

"With your mind, your manners—"

"Yes, yes, my mind—yes!"

"And then, you're a count. Couldn't you make a better match, if you really wanted, for some reason or other, to get married? Only think what your relatives would say?"

"My dear fellow, they'd simply do for me! I have already suffered so much from their treachery and ill-nature. You know, I suspect they wanted to get me into a mad-house. Now, I ask you, my dear boy, is there any sense in that? What would I do in a madhouse?"

"Why certainly, Uncle, and that's why I won't leave your side when you go downstairs. There are visitors now."

"Visitors? Oh, heavens!"

"Don't you worry, Uncle, I shall be with you!"

"How grateful I am to you, my dear boy, you are simply my deliverer! But I think I had better just go away, you know!"

"Tomorrow, Uncle, tomorrow morning at seven. And today you can say good-bye to everyone and tell them you are leaving."

"I will certainly go—to Father Misail—but supposing they try and make me marry, my boy?"

"Don't be afraid, Uncle, I shall be with you, and you know, whatever they tell you, whatever they hint at, you can simply say it was all a dream—which it really was. . . ."

"Yes, yes, a dream. But still, my friend, it was a delightful dream, you know. She's so marvellously beautiful, such lines, you know—"

"Well, good-bye, Uncle, I'm going downstairs, and you—"

"What? You are going to leave me?" cried the Count in alarm.

"No, Uncle, we'll both go down, but separately. First I, and afterwards, you. That'll be best."

"Very well. And I have an idea that I must write down, anyhow."

"That's right, Uncle, write down your idea and then come, but don't take too long. Tomorrow morning—"

"And tomorrow morning I'll go to the Holy Father, I will certainly go to the Holy Father! *Charmant, charmant!* But, you know, she's very good-looking, my friend—such lines . . . and if I found I really had to get married, I'd. . . ."

"God forbid, Uncle!"

"Yes, yes, God forbid! Well, good-bye, my dear boy, I'll be down in a minute—I'll just write something down. *À propos*, I've been wanting to ask you for a long time—have you read the memoirs of Casanova?"

"Yes, Uncle, why do you ask me?"

"Oh, nothing! I've forgotten what I wanted to say—"

"You'll remember later, Uncle. Good-bye!"

"Good-bye, my friend, good-bye! But still it was a delightful dream, a delightful dream!"

CHAPTER XII

"We thought we'd look in on you—all of us! Praskovya Ilyinishna is coming, too, and Louisa Karlovna said she would," twittered Anna Nikolayevna, looking eagerly round as she entered the salon.

She was a pretty enough little woman, dressed garishly but expensively and moreover well aware of her prettiness. She could not help thinking that the Count and Zena were hidden in some corner.

"And Katerina Petrovna is coming, and Felisata Mikhailovna said she would, too," added Natalya Dmitriyevna, the lady of vast dimensions whose "lines" had pleased the Count so much, though she was extraordinarily like a grenadier, and wore the tiniest little pink hat perched on the very back of her head. It was now three weeks since she had become the most intimate friend of Anna Nikolayevna, whose favours she had long been seeking and whom, judging by her appearance, she could have swallowed in a single mouthful, and crunched the bones.

"I do not mention the joy, if I may call it so, which I feel at seeing both of you in my house, and in the evening too," crooned Marya Alexandrovna, recovering from her momentary astonishment. "But do tell me by what miracle you are here today after I had long despaired of such an honour?"

"Oh, heavens, Marya Alexandrovna, how can you?" responded Natalya Dmitriyevna in honeyed accents, her

affected, shrill, and simpering manner forming a striking contrast to her formidable appearance.

"*Mais, ma charmante*," twittered Anna Nikolayevna. "After all it's high time for us to get our theatrical performance started. Only today Pyotr Mikhailovich told Kalist Stanislavich how disappointed he was that we are not getting on with it and can do nothing but quarrel. And so we met together this evening and thought: let's go to Marya Alexandrovna and settle it once for all! Natalya Dmitriyevna sent word to the others. They're all coming, and we shall be able to come to an agreement, which will be a very good thing. We won't have people saying we do nothing but quarrel, will we, *mon ange*?" she added playfully, kissing Marya Alexandrovna. "Dear me, Zenaida Afanasyevna—you get prettier and prettier every day!"

Anna Nikolayevna rushed up to kiss Zena.

"What else has she to do but get prettier and prettier," added Natalya Dmitriyevna sweetly, rubbing the palms of her enormous hands together.

"Devil take them! I had quite forgotten about those theatricals! They found a way, the magpies!" whispered Marya Alexandrovna, beside herself with rage.

"All the more, my angel," added Anna Nikolayevna, "that that dear Count is with you now. You know the former owners of Dukhanovo used to run a theatre. We have made inquiries and discovered that all sorts of old bits of scenery, some curtains and even costumes, are put away there. The Count was at my house today but I was so astonished by his arrival that I quite forgot to speak to him about it. Now you'll help us to bring the talk round to the theatre and the Count will have all that old rubbish sent to us. For whom can we find to do such a thing as scenery here? And, most important of all, we want to get the Count to take an interest in our theatre, too. He simply must subscribe—it's all for the poor.

Perhaps he might even take a part, he's so nice, isn't he? That would be simply divine."

"Of course, he'll take a part. He can be made to play any role," added Natalya Dmitriyevna significantly.

Anna Nikolayevna had spoken the truth—ladies kept coming in all the time. Marya Alexandrovna hardly had time to greet them and utter the exclamations required in such cases by decency and *comme il faut*.

I will not attempt to describe all the lady visitors. I will only say that they all looked exceedingly knowing. On every face was written expectation and a kind of savage impatience. Some of the ladies had come with the resolute determination to be the witnesses of a scandalous scene, and would have been exceedingly vexed if they had had to leave without seeing it. Outwardly everyone behaved most courteously, but Marya Alexandrovna braced herself for attack. Questions about the Count, ostensibly quite innocent, but each containing some hint or taunt, were showered upon her. Tea was brought in and the guests disposed themselves about the room. One group took possession of the grand piano. To all invitations to play and sing, Zena replied coldly that she did not feel well. The pallor of her face bore witness to the truth of this. She was immediately bombarded with sympathetic inquiries, and here, too, opportunities were made to ask this, hint at that. Mozglyakov was also inquired for, and all such inquiries were directed at Zena. Marya Alexandrovna redoubled her zeal, kept an eye on every corner of the room, heard what each lady visitor was saying, although there were nearly ten of them, and, needless to say, was never caught unawares. She trembled for Zena and was astonished that the girl did not go away, as she had always done before on such occasions. Afanasy Matveich, too, came in for a good deal of attention. It was the habit to laugh at him, so as to wound Marya Alexandrovna. Now it was hoped to get some-

thing out of the slow-witted, obtuse Afanasy Matveich. Marya Alexandrovna anxiously followed the progress of the siege against her husband. Moreover, the distressed, unnatural way he replied "Ahem!" to all questions was enough to drive her mad with rage.

"Marya Alexandrovna! Afanasy Matveich won't speak to us!" cried a bold, sharp-eyed little lady, who feared no one whatever and whom nothing could disconcert. "Do tell him to be more polite to ladies!"

"I'm sure I don't know what has come over him to-day," replied Marya Alexandrovna interrupting her conversation with Anna Nikolayevna and Natalya Dmitriyevna and smiling brightly. "He's so unsociable! He has hardly said a word even to me! Why don't you answer Felisata Mikhailovna, *Athanase*? What did you ask him?"

"But—but—you told me yourself, my dear," began the astonished and disconcerted Afanasy Matveich. He was standing up, sipping his tea at the fireplace, one hand thrust into his waistcoat, in a picturesque pose chosen by himself. The ladies' questions embarrassed him so much that he blushed like a young girl. His inarticulate apologies met with such a terrible look from his infuriated spouse that he almost fainted with fear. Not knowing what to do, and desiring to set himself right and once more earn respect, he took another sip. But the tea was hot. He took too big a gulp and, burning his mouth, dropped the cup, choking and coughing so violently that he had to leave the room temporarily, to everyone's embarrassment. Everything was now quite clear. Marya Alexandrovna saw that her guests knew all and had assembled with the very worst intentions. The situation was fraught with danger. They might conspire to confuse the poor old man in her very presence. They even might get him away from her, make mischief between them that very evening and entice him over to their side. Anything

was to be expected. But fate had yet another ordeal in store for her—the door opened and in came Mozglyakov, whom she had thought to be at the Boroduyevs and had not for a moment expected that evening. She started as if she had been stung.

Mozglyakov stood in the doorway looking round in some confusion. He was unable to control his agitation, which showed clearly in his face.

"Why, good heavens! It's Pavel Alexandrovich!" cried several voices.

"Good heavens! Why, it's Pavel Alexandrovich! Why did you say he was at the Boroduyevs, Marya Alexandrovna? We were told that you were hiding at the Boroduyevs, Pavel Alexandrovich," squealed Natalya Dmitriyevna.

"Hiding?" echoed Mozglyakov with an extremely wry smile. "What a strange expression! Excuse me, Natalya Dmitriyevna, but I am not hiding from anyone and have nothing to hide, myself," he added, glancing significantly at Marya Alexandrovna.

Marya Alexandrovna was plunged in trepidation.

"What! Is that worm going to turn on me too!" she said to herself, casting a searching glance at Mozglyakov. "That would be the worst thing that could happen!"

"Is it true, Pavel Alexandrovich, that you have been dismissed . . . from your work, of course?" demanded the insolent Felisata Mikhailovna, gazing into his eyes derisively.

"Dismissed? What do you mean? I'm changing my post. I have a post waiting for me in Petersburg," replied Mozglyakov coldly.

"In that case I congratulate you," went on Felisata Mikhailovna. "We were all quite frightened when we heard you were looking for a place here, in Mordasov. The places here are so very unreliable, Pavel Alexandrovich, one may be booted out at any moment."

"All but teachers in the district school— a vacancy may still be found there," remarked Natalya Dmitriyevna.

The hint was so crude, so indelicate, that even Anna Nikolayevna felt uneasy and gave her friend a slight kick by way of admonition.

"Surely, you don't think Pavel Alexandrovich would take the place of some teacher," put in Felisata Mikhailovna.

Pavel Alexandrovich, unable to find any rejoinder, turned away and stumbled against Afanasy Matveich, who was holding out his hand to him. Mozglyakov rejected the hand awkwardly and bowed mockingly from the waist. Then, in a state of excessive irritation, he went straight up to Zena and whispered, glaring into her eyes:

"This is all your doing! Wait, I'll show you this very evening if I'm a fool or not!"

"Why put it off? It's quite obvious as it is," retorted Zena, measuring her former suitor with eyes filled with disgust.

Mozglyakov shied away from her, startled by the loudness of her voice.

"Have you come from Eoroduyev?" Marya Alexandrovna at last brought out.

"No. I've come from my uncle."

"Your uncle? Do you mean you've just been with the Count?"

"Oh, heavens! So the Count is up! And they told us he was asleep," interposed Natalya Dmitriyevna with a scathing look at Marya Alexandrovna.

"Don't worry about the Count, Natalya Dmitriyevna," said Mozglyakov. "He's waked up and, thank God, is quite himself again. They made him drunk at your house, and finished him off here, so that he quite lost his head, which is none too strong at the best. But now, thank God, we've had a talk and he has begun to see things in

a sober light. He'll be here in a minute, Marya Alexandrovna, to greet you and thank you for all your hospitality. Tomorrow at daylight we are going to the hermitage, after which I will make a point of taking him back to Dukhanovo myself, to see he doesn't have another fall such as the one he had today. And there I will hand him over to Stepanida Matveyevna who by then will certainly have returned from Moscow, and who will never let him go travelling by himself again—I'll answer for that."

With these words Mozglyakov looked maliciously at Marya Alexandrovna. She was dumbfounded. I must sorrowfully admit that my heroine, for perhaps the first time in her life, gave way to fear.

"So they're going away first thing tomorrow morning? How is that?" asked Natalya Dmitriyevna, turning to Marya Alexandrovna.

"How is that?" the guests kept asking innocently. "And we heard . . . how very strange!"

But the hostess no longer had the heart to answer them, and the attention of all was suddenly attracted in the most extraordinary and eccentric fashion. A mysterious noise, in which were mingled shrill exclamations, was heard in the room leading into Marya Alexandrovna's salon, and all of a sudden Sofya Petrovna Karpukhina burst in like a tornado. Sofya Petrovna was undoubtedly the most eccentric lady in Mordasov, so eccentric that at last even the ladies of Mordasov had decided not to receive her into their homes any more. It should be added that she had a snack every evening precisely at seven o'clock—for her stomach's sake, as she put it, and after this snack was usually in a state of complete emancipation, to say no more. This was exactly the state she was in today, when she burst so suddenly upon Marya Alexandrovna.

"So that's the way, Marya Alexandrovna," she shouted at the top of her voice, "that's the way you treat me! Don't be afraid, I've only come for a minute. I won't even sit down. I came here on purpose to see if it was true what I have been told. So you have balls, banquets, betrothals, and Sofya Petrovna can stay at home and knit stockings. Inviting the whole town—everyone but me! And not so very long ago I was your friend and *mon ange* when I came to tell you about the Count at Natalya Dmitriyevna's. And now Natalya Dmitriyevna, whom you roundly abused not long ago, and who abused you, is sitting in your drawing-room. I don't want your chocolate *à la santé*, ten kopeks a bar. Don't worry, Natalya Dmitriyevna! I can drink chocolate at home, and a great deal oftener than you do! Ugh!"

"That's obvious," remarked Natalya Dmitriyevna.

"Why, Sofya Petrovna!" cried Marya Alexandrovna, flushing in her vexation. "What's the matter with you? Do try to be a little more reasonable!"

"Never mind me, Marya Alexandrovna! I know everything. I've heard everything!" cried Sofya Petrovna in her harsh grating voice, and the guests crowded round her as if exulting in the unexpected row. "I've heard everything! Your Nastasya came running to me and told me everything! You grabbed that poor dear Count, filled him up with drink, and made him propose to your daughter, whom nobody wants to marry any more! Yes, and you think you'll become an important personage yourself—a countess all got up in lace forsooth! Never mind, I'm a colonel's wife myself! What do I care whether you invite me to the betrothal, or not! I've seen better folk than you. I dined at the Countess Zalikhvatskaya's! Ober-commissar Kurochkin himself wanted to marry me! A fig for you and your invitation!"

"Look here, Sofya Petrovna," replied Marya Alexandrovna, almost beside herself, "let me tell you, people do

not burst into a genteel home, especially in the state you're in, and if you do not relieve me of your presence and your eloquence I shall immediately take measures."

"I know—you'll have me turned out by your miserable servants! Don't trouble, I can find the way out myself. Good-bye, marry off anyone you like, and you, Natalya Dmitriyevna, don't you laugh at me! What do I care for your chocolate? I may not have been invited, but at least I didn't dance the Ukrainian dance in front of the Count. And what are you laughing at, Anna Nikolayevna? That Sushilov has broken his leg—they've just carried him home—ugh! And you, Felisata Mikhailovna, if you don't tell your bare-legged Matryoshka to drive your cow away so that it doesn't moo under my window every day, I'll break your Matryoshka's leg for her. Good-bye, Marya Alexandrovna, good luck to you—ugh!"

Sofya Petrovna took herself off amidst general laughter. Marya Alexandrovna was greatly disconcerted.

"I'm afraid she's been drinking," said Natalya Dmitriyevna sweetly.

"But the impudence, the impudence!"

"Quelle abominable femme!"

"She certainly made us laugh!"

"What awful things she said, though!"

"But what was that she said about some betrothal? What did she mean, I wonder?" asked Felisata Mikhailovna derisively.

"It's simply appalling!" burst out Marya Alexandrovna at last. "It's monsters like that who spread those incessant absurd rumours! The wonder, Felisata Mikhailovna, is, not that such ladies should be found among us—no, what is still more amazing is that these ladies are needed, they are listened to, encouraged, they are believed, they—"

"The Count, the Count!" cried all the guests suddenly.

"Oh, heavens! *Ce cher prince!*"

"Well, we shall find out everything now, thank God!" Felisata Mikhailovna whispered to her neighbour.

CHAPTER XIII

The Count entered the room smiling ecstatically. Every trace of the alarm which a quarter of an hour before Mozglyakov had aroused in his shallow heart, vanished at the sight of the ladies, and he melted like a sucked jujube. The ladies greeted him with squeals of joy. Ladies, it must be said, always petted our old fellow and treated him with extraordinary familiarity. The very look of him was enough to cause them infinite amusement. That very morning Felisata Mikhailovna had declared (facetiously to be sure!) that she was ready to sit in his lap if this would be any pleasure to him—"because he's such a dear duck of an old man, simply adorable!" Marya Alexandrovna fixed her eyes upon him, desirous of reading something on his face which should help her to find a way out of her critical situation. It was obvious that Mozglyakov had made the most appalling mischief and that all her plans had been powerfully undermined. But there was nothing to be read on the Count's countenance. He was the same as ever.

"Oh, heavens! Here's the Count! We thought you were never going to come!" cried several ladies together.

"We did, Count, we did!" squealed others.

"I am excessively flattered," lisped the Count, seating himself at the table, on which the samovar was boiling. The ladies immediately surrounded him. Only Anna Nikolayevna and Natalya Dmitriyevna remained beside Marya Alexandrovna. Afanasy Matveich smiled respectfully. Mozglyakov smiled, too, looking defiant-

ly at Zena, who, without paying the slightest attention to him, went up to her father and took a chair at the fire-place beside him.

"Oh, Count, is it true that you mean to leave us?" shrilled Felisata Mikhailovna.

"Yes, yes, Mesdames, I am going away. I shall go abroad immediately."

"Abroad, Count?" they shouted in chorus. "What put that into your head?"

"Abroad," repeated the Count, bridling. "I want to go abroad for new ideas, you know."

"For new ideas! What about?" asked the ladies, exchanging glances.

"Yes, yes, for new ideas," repeated the Count with an air of profound conviction. "Everyone travels in search of new ideas, nowadays. And I want to get some new ideas, too."

"You aren't going to join a masonic lodge, are you, Uncle?" put in Mozglyakov, evidently desiring to show off his wit and familiarity in front of the ladies.

"Yes, yes, my dear boy, you are not mistaken," replied his uncle unexpectedly. "In the old days I really did belong to a masonic lodge abroad, and had a great many magnanimous ideas. I was even going to do a great deal for modern education and quite made up my mind in Frankfort to give my Sidor, whom I took abroad with me, his freedom. But to my astonishment he ran away from me himself. Strange creature, eh? Then all of a sudden I met him in Paris—a regular dandy with whiskers!—walking in the boulevard with a mademoiselle. He looked at me and nodded. And the mademoiselle with him was so lively and bright, so seductive—"

"Well, then, Uncle, you'll be giving all your peasants their freedom now, since you go abroad," cried Mozglyakov laughing heartily.

"You have guessed my intentions perfectly, my dear boy," replied the Count blandly. "I intend to give them all their freedom."

"But, Count, they'll all run away from you if you do, and then who will pay you your dues?" cried Felisata Mikhailovna.

"Of course they will—they'll all run away," said Anna Nikolayevna anxiously.

"Oh, heavens! D'you mean to say they'll really all run away?" exclaimed the Count in astonishment.

"They will, they'll run away at once, and leave you all alone," Natalya Dmitriyevna assured him.

"Oh, heavens! Then I will certainly not give them their freedom. I didn't really mean it, you know!"

"That's better, Uncle," said Mozglyakov encouragingly.

Till now Marya Alexandrovna had listened and watched in silence. It seemed to her that the Count had forgotten all about her and that this was most unnatural.

"Allow me, Count," she began in loud dignified tones, "to introduce my husband, Afanasy Matveich. He came purposely from the country as soon as he heard that you were staying in my house."

Afanasy Matveich smiled and drew himself up, as if he had heard a sort of compliment to himself.

"Delighted!" said the Count. "Afanasy Matveich! Why, I seem to remember. Afanasy Matveich—yes, yes, the one who lives in the country. *Charmant, charmant*, delighted. Isn't that the one we heard the couplet about this morning, my dear boy?" he went on, turning to Mozglyakov. "How did it go? Don't you remember? You even made it rhyme somehow. Yes, yes! The husband comes home—and the wife—oh, yes, she does something droll, too!"

"That vaudeville we got up last year," put in Felisata Mikhailovna.

"Yes, yes, that was it. I forget everything. *Charmant, charmant!* So you're the one? Very glad to meet you," said the Count holding out his hand to the smiling Afanasy Matveich without getting up from his easy chair. "And how are you?"

"Ahem. . ."

"He's quite well, Count. quite well," replied Marya Alexandrovna hastily.

"Oh, yes, I can see he's quite well. And do you live all the time in the country? Well, I'm very glad. Such red cheeks, and laughing all the time—"

Afanasy Matveich smiled, bowed, and even scraped his foot. But the Count's last remark quite broke down his self-control, and suddenly, for no apparent reason, he burst out laughing in the most foolish manner. Everyone laughed. The ladies squealed with delight. Zena flushed and looked at Marya Alexandrovna with blazing eyes. The latter, almost bursting with rage, endeavoured to change the subject.

"How did you sleep, Count?" she inquired in honeyed accents, at the same time giving Afanasy Matveich to understand by a threatening glance that he must go back to his place at once.

"Oh, I slept very well," replied the Count, "and I had such a charming dream!"

"A dream! I adore hearing people tell their dreams!" exclaimed Felisata Mikhailovna.

"So do I, I simply love it," added Natalya Dmitriyevna.

"A charming dream," repeated the Count with a melting smile, "but this dream is a great secret, you know."

"What, Count! Do you mean to say it can't be told? It must have been a very marvellous one!" remarked Anna Nikolayevna.

"A great secret," repeated the Count, who thoroughly enjoyed tickling the curiosity of the ladies.

"How vastly interesting it must have been!" cried the ladies.

"I wager the Count knelt before some beauty in his dream and proposed to her," cried Felisata Mikhailovna. "Come, Count, admit it, do now, dearest Count!"

"Admit it, Count! Admit it!" was heard from all sides.

The Count drank in all these cries triumphantly, in a kind of ecstasy. The ladies' suggestions flattered his vanity excessively, and he all but smacked his lips.

"Although I said my dream was a great secret," he brought out at last, "I am obliged to admit that, to my astonishment, Madame, you have almost guessed it."

"Guessed it!" cried Felisata Mikhailovna in ecstasy. "Come, Count, you simply must tell us who this beauty was, now!"

"You must, you must!"

"Does she live here?"

"Do tell us, darling Count!"

"Dear, darling Count, tell us! Tell us even if it kills you!" came from all sides.

"Mesdames, Mesdames!... If you insist on knowing I can only tell you one thing, and that is that she was the most charming and, I may say, the most virtuous young lady I have ever known," mumbled the Count, now completely melted.

"The most charming! And she lives here! Who can it be?" asked the ladies exchanging meaning glances and winks.

"It must be the one who is considered the reigning beauty among us," said Natalya Dmitriyevna, rubbing her red hands and turning her feline eyes towards Zena, and all the others followed her example and looked at Zena.

"Well, then, Count, since you have such dreams, why shouldn't you really get married?" asked Felisata Mikhailovna sweeping a significant glance around.

"What a grand wedding we'd give you!" put in another lady.

"Darling Count, do get married!" squeaked a third.

"Get married, get married!" came from all sides. "Why shouldn't you get married?"

"Yes, yes—why shouldn't I get married?" echoed the Count, quite bewildered by all this noise.

"Uncle!" exclaimed Mozglyakov.

"Yes, yes, my dear boy! I understand you. What I wanted to tell you, Mesdames, was that I am no longer in a position to marry and, having spent a delightful evening with our charming hostess I shall leave tomorrow for the hermitage to see Father Misail, and go straight abroad from there, in order to follow the development of European culture more closely."

Zena turned pale and gazed in ineffable distress at her mother. But Marya Alexandrovna had already made up her mind. Up till now she had merely waited, testing the ground, though she realized that things were irrevocably spoiled and that her enemies had outwitted her. At last she understood it all, and determined at a single blow to destroy the hundred-headed hydra. She rose majestically from her chair and walked firmly up to the table, measuring her pigmy enemies with a proud glance. The fire of inspiration blazed in that glance. She had made up her mind to vanquish, to scatter all those scurrilous scandalmongers, to crush the miscreant Mozglyakov like a beetle and, with one bold resolute blow, to recover all her lost influence over the imbecile Count. This, of course, demanded extraordinary audacity, but Marya Alexandrovna was not one to shirk a risk.

"Mesdames," she began with solemn dignity (Marya

Alexandrovna doted on solemn occasions), "Mesdames, I have been listening to your conversation, your gaiety and witticisms for a long time and consider the moment has come for me to say a word. As you know, we have all gathered together here—quite by chance (and right glad I am to see you all!)—I should never have ventured to be the first to reveal an important family secret and announce it earlier than the strictest decorum requires. In particular I ask the pardon of my dear guest. But it seemed to me that he himself, by distant hints at the same circumstance, was trying to show me that not only would a formal and solemn announcement of our family secret give him pleasure, but that he even desired such an announcement . . . I am right, Count, am I not?"

"Yes, yes, you are right . . . and I am very, very glad," said the Count who had not the faintest idea what it was all about.

Marya Alexandrovna made an effective pause for breath, and looked round at the company. The guests listened to her with eager curiosity. Mozglyakov trembled. Zena flushed and half rose from her chair. Afanasy Matveich, anticipating something unusual, blew his nose.

"Yes, Mesdames, I have the utmost pleasure in confiding to you my family secret. This afternoon the Count, attracted by the beauty and virtues of my daughter, did her the honour of making her a proposal. Count!" she concluded in a voice shaken with tears and agitation. "Dear Count, you must not, you cannot be angry with me for my indiscretion. Nothing but the extraordinary joy which has come to my family could have drawn from my heart this precious secret and—what mother will blame me in this case?"

I can find no words to express the effect produced by Marya Alexandrovna's unexpected sally. Everyone seemed to be petrified with astonishment. The false-hearted

ladies, who had counted on frightening Marya Alexandrovna by showing her that they knew her secret, and crushing her by its premature exposé, who had thought to torture her for the present by the merest hints, were dumbfounded by such audacious frankness. Surely such fearless frankness must imply some inner assurance! "So the Count really is going to marry Zena of his own free will! It means they didn't entice him, make him drunk, trick him. It means they are not forcing him into marriage in a secret thievish manner. It means Marya Alexandrovna is afraid of no one. It means this marriage cannot be upset, since the Count is not being married by force." A whisper rapidly developing into squeals of joy swept over the company. The first to rush to embrace Marya Alexandrovna was Natalya Dmitriyevna. After her came Anna Nikolayevna, and then Felisata Mikhailovna. The rest of the ladies, many of them pale with rage, jumped from their seats and crowded round. They began congratulating the embarrassed Zena. They even pounced upon Afanasy Matveich. Marya Alexandrovna opened her arms with a picturesque gesture and folded her daughter, almost by main force, in her embrace. The Count alone regarded the scene in strange bewilderment though he still kept on smiling. In a way, however, the scene pleased him. When the mother and daughter embraced he took out his handkerchief and wiped his real eye, in which a tear had appeared. It goes without saying that everybody rushed to him with congratulations.

"Congratulations, Count, congratulations!" came from all sides.

"So you are getting married!"

"So you are really getting married!"

"Darling Count, so you are getting married!"

"Yes, yes," replied the Count, delighted with the congratulations and general enthusiasm. "And I admit, your charming sympathy, which I shall never forget, never,

pleases me most of all. *Charmant! Charmant!* You have brought tears to my eyes...."

"Kiss me, Count," shouted Felisata Mikhailovna, louder than all the rest.

"And I admit," the Count went on, in the midst of continual interruptions, "what astonished me most of all was that Marya Alexandrovna, our esteemed hostess, has guessed the meaning of my dream with such extraordinary penetration. You might think it was she who had dreamed it, and not I. Extraordinary penetration, extraordinary penetration!"

"Oh, Count, you are going back to your dream again!"

"Come, Count, admit it, admit it!" they all cried, crowding round him.

"Yes, Count, it's no good trying to conceal it, it is time to reveal this secret," said Marya Alexandrovna with resolute severity. "I saw through your subtle allegory, the exquisite delicacy with which you tried to hint to me of your desire to announce your sacred secret. Yes, Mesdames, it is true. The Count did kneel at my daughter's feet today, in very truth and not in a dream, and made her a formal proposal."

"Just as if it had really happened, and in the very same circumstances," confirmed the Count. "Mademoiselle," he continued, turning with extraordinary courtesy to Zena, who had not yet recovered from her astonishment. "Mademoiselle! I swear I would never have dared to utter your name if others had not uttered it before me. It was a delightful dream, a delightful dream, and I am doubly happy to be allowed to tell it to you. *Charmant, charmant!*"

"What does it all mean? He keeps talking about his dream!" whispered Anna Nikolayevna to Marya Alexandrovna, who was pale with alarm.

Alas! Without any such warnings Marya Alexandrovna's heart had long been beset by doubts and anxiety.

"What can it mean?" whispered the ladies, exchanging glances.

"Really, Count," began Marya Alexandrovna with a wry, sickly smile. "You astonish me, you do indeed. What is this strange idea about a dream? I confess I thought up to now that you were joking, but—if this is a joke, it is very much out of place—I should like, I wish to attribute it to your absence of mind, but—"

"Perhaps it really was nothing but absence of mind," hissed Natalya Dmitriyevna.

"Yes, yes—absence of mind," agreed the Count, still not quite understanding what was required of him. "It reminds me of a certain little incident. I was once invited to a funeral in Petersburg, by some people, *maison bourgeoise, mais honnête*, and I got mixed up and thought it was a name-day. There had been a name-day the week before. I got a bouquet of camellias, for the lady whose name-day it was. But when I went in, what did I see—a worthy, respectable-looking person stretched out on the table! I was quite astonished. I simply did not know what to do with my bouquet!"

"But, Count, this is no time for anecdotes," said Marya Alexandrovna, interrupting him in her vexation. "My daughter need not run after suitors of course, but not long ago you proposed to her, just here, next to the piano. I did not require it of you. It came, I might say, as a shock . . . of course a certain idea flashed through my mind at the time, and I postponed it till you should wake up. But I am a mother. She's my daughter . . . you yourself just now mentioned a dream, and I thought you wished, in allegorical form, to announce your betrothal. I am well aware that you may have been tampered with—I even suspect who it was—but explain yourself, Count, explain yourself immediately, satisfactorily. You cannot play fast and loose with the feelings of a gentle family like this!"

"Yes, yes, one cannot play fast and loose with the feelings of a genteel family!" echoed the Count mechanically, though he was by now beginning to show signs of slight anxiety.

"But that is no answer to my question, Count. I ask you to give me a positive reply. Confirm, now and here, in the presence of all, that you proposed to my daughter not long ago."

"Yes, yes, I am ready to confirm it. But I have said so already, and Felisata Mikhailovna interpreted my dream perfectly."

"It wasn't a dream! It wasn't a dream!" shrieked Marya Alexandrovna furiously. "It wasn't a dream, it was real, Count, real! Do you hear me, real!"

"Real?" exclaimed the Count, rising from his chair in astonishment. "Well, my friend! It has turned out just as you prophesied," he added turning to Mozglyakov. "But I assure you, respected Marya Alexandrovna, that you are misled. I am perfectly certain it was only a dream!"

"Good God!" exclaimed Marya Alexandrovna.

"Don't lose heart, Marya Alexandrovna," said Natalya Dmitriyevna, "perhaps the Count has just forgotten . . . he'll remember. . . ."

"I'm surprised at you, Natalya Dmitriyevna," cried Marya Alexandrovna, indignantly. "As if a thing like that could be forgotten! Come, Count! Are you laughing at us? Or are you determined to pose as one of those *petits-maitres* of the Regency period depicted by Dumas? Some Ferlacour or Lausin? You will not succeed in this, allow me to tell you—to say nothing of your age, which is not exactly suited to the part! My daughter is not a French viscountess. A short time ago, here, on this very spot, she sang to you, and you, charmed by her singing, went down on your knees and proposed to her. You don't suppose I am dreaming? I'm not asleep, am I? Speak, Count—am I asleep or am I awake?"

"Yes, yes ... that is to say—no!" replied the bewildered Count. "I mean, now, I seem to be awake. But I was sleeping then, you see, and I had a dream ... it was all a dream."

"What do you mean, for God's sake, tell me that! It *wasn't* a dream—it *was* a dream! It *was* a dream, it *wasn't* a dream! Why, it's simply outrageous! Are you raving, Count?"

"Yes, what on earth ... but now I seem to be quite mixed up," said the Count sending anxious glances all round him.

"How could it have been a dream," insisted Marya Alexandrovna desperately, "when I tell it to you in such detail before you had told anyone your dream?"

"Ah, but perhaps the Count did tell it to someone," interposed Natalya Dmitriyevna.

"Yes, yes, perhaps I told it to someone," confirmed the now completely bewildered Count.

"It's as good as a play!" whispered Felisata Mikhailovna to her neighbour.

"Oh, my God! It's enough to try the patience of a saint!" cried Marya Alexandrovna, wringing her hands in agony. "She sang to you, sang to you! Was that a dream, too?"

"Yes, yes, I think she really did sing to me," mused the Count.

And suddenly his face was lit up by a memory.

"My dear boy!" he exclaimed turning to Mozglyakov. "I forgot to tell you just now that there really was some song, and there were castles in the song, ever such a lot of castles, and then there was some troubadour. Why, yes, I remember it all ... it even made me cry—so you see, I'm not sure it was only a dream—perhaps it wasn't a dream, after all!"

"I must say, Uncle," replied Mozglyakov as calmly as he could, though there was an uneasy note in his voice,

"I must say that in my opinion all that can very easily be solved. I think you really did hear singing. Zenaida Afanasyevna sings beautifully. After dinner you were brought in here, and Zenaida Afanasyevna sang to you. I wasn't there myself, but you were probably moved, remembering the old days. Perhaps you remembered that viscountess you sang duets with, whom you told us about this morning. Well, and then, you went to lie down, and under the influence of these pleasant impressions you dreamed you were in love and had made a proposal...."

Marya Alexandrovna was absolutely dumbfounded by such audacity.

"Why, that's exactly how it was, my boy!" cried the Count in ecstasy. "Precisely under the influence of pleasant impressions. I really do remember someone singing to me, and that made me want to get married, in my sleep. And the viscountess was in it too. How skilfully you have unravelled it all, my dear boy! Well, now I'm quite sure it was all a dream. Marya Alexandrovna! I assure you you are mistaken! It was a dream. Otherwise I would never have played with your noble feelings—"

"Ah! Now I see whose work it is!" cried Marya Alexandrovna turning to Mozglyakov, beside herself with rage. "It was you, sir, you, dishonourable man, this is all your work! You confused the mind of this poor imbecile, because you had been rejected yourself. But you shall pay for this insult, you loathsome creature! You shall pay! You shall pay! You shall pay!"

"Marya Alexandrovna!" cried Mozglyakov, turning as red as a lobster. "Your words are so—I don't know how to express myself about your words—no other society lady would allow herself—I, at least, will stand up for my relation. You know very well you enticed...."

"Yes, yes, enticed!" echoed the Count, trying to hide behind Mozglyakov.

"Afanasy Matveich!" squealed Marya Alexandrovna in an unnatural voice. "Don't you hear how we are being disgraced and dishonoured? Have you quite relinquished all obligations? Are you no longer the father of a family, are you nothing but a revolting block of wood? Don't stand there blinking! Another husband would long ago have wiped out such an insult to his family—in blood!..."

"Wife!" began Afanasy Matveich pompously, proud that he also was needed. "Wife! Perhaps it was you who dreamed all this and then when you waked, mixed everything up as you always do—"

But Afanasy Matveich was not destined to bring his brilliant surmise to a conclusion. Up till now the visitors had controlled themselves, assuming airs of the utmost propriety. But now a loud and uncontrollable burst of laughter resounded throughout the room. Marya Alexandrovna, quite forgetting all decency, made for her husband, no doubt with the intention of scratching out his eyes on the spot. But she was held back by force. Natalya Dmitriyevna took advantage of the circumstances to add another little drop of poison.

"Oh, Marya Alexandrovna, perhaps that's really how it was, and you are letting it upset you," she said in the most honeyed accents.

"How what was?" cried Marya Alexandrovna, not quite understanding her meaning.

"Oh, Marya Alexandrovna, it does happen sometimes—"

"What does happen? Why do you tease me? Can't you say it outright?"

"Perhaps you really only dreamed it all!"

"Dreamed! *I* dreamed! And you dare to say that to my face?"

"After all, perhaps that's how it really was!" said Felisata Mikhailovna.

"Yes, yes, perhaps that's how it really was," muttered the Count in his turn.

"And he—he, too! Oh, my God!" cried Marya Alexandrovna, flinging her arms out in a wide gesture.

"How you take it to heart, Marya Alexandrovna! Remember that dreams are sent by the Lord. If it's the Lord's will it is no use resisting. There's nothing to be angry about."

"Yes, yes, nothing to be angry about," echoed the Count.

"Do you think I have gone mad?" said Marya Alexandrovna, hardly able to bring out the words for her angry pantings. This was really beyond human endurance. She hastily looked round for a chair and dropped into it in a swoon. A terrific hubbub arose.

"She fainted to save her face," whispered Natalya Dmitriyevna to Anna Nikolayevna.

But just then, when public indignation and the tensivity of the whole scene had reached a climax, the only person who had till now taken no part in it, suddenly came forward, and everything assumed quite another aspect....

CHAPTER XIV

Zenaida Afanasyevna was on the whole an exceedingly romantic individual. Whether this was, as Marya Alexandrovna herself declared, a consequence of reading too often with "that teacher of hers" the works of "that fool Shakespeare," I cannot say, but never before in all her life in Mordasov had Zena shown herself to be so extraordinarily romantic, or, I would say, heroic, as at the moment we will now describe.

Pale, with a determined expression in her eyes, but almost trembling with emotion, divinely beautiful in her indignation, she stepped forward. Sweeping a long, de-

fiant glance around, in the midst of the sudden silence which had immediately fallen, she turned to her mother, who at her first movement came out of her faint and opened her eyes.

"Mamma," said Zena. "Why go on pretending? Why stain your honour still further with lies? Everything is now so defiled, that really it is not worth the humiliation and trouble of trying to conceal all this filth."

"Zena! Zena! What's come over you? Think what you're saying!" cried the terrified Marya Alexandrovna, jumping out of her chair.

"I told you, Mamma, I told you beforehand that I should not be able to endure all this disgrace," continued Zena. "Must we really sink still lower, defile ourselves still more? But I will take everything on myself, Mamma, because I am the most to blame of all. It was I who permitted this loathsome . . . intrigue to go on. You are a mother. You love me. You tried in your own way, according to your own lights, to bring about my happiness. Allowance may be made for your behaviour, but mine—mine can never be forgiven!"

"Zena, surely you don't mean to tell everything? Oh, my God! I had a presentiment that this dagger would not be deflected from my heart."

"Yes, Mamma, I will tell everything! I am disgraced, you are, we are all disgraced!"

"You exaggerate, Zena! You are not yourself, and you don't know what you're saying! And why say anything? There's no sense in it. The shame is not ours—I will prove this minute that the shame is not ours—"

"No, Mamma!" cried Zena with an angry tremor in her voice. "I will no longer keep silence before these people whose opinion I despise and who have come here to laugh at us. I will not endure their insults. Not a single one of them has a right to throw mud at me. They are all capable, this very moment, of behaving a hundred

times worse than you or I. Dare they, can they, be our judges?"

"That's the way! Listen to her! How do you like that? She's insulting us!" could be heard from all sides.

"Why, she simply doesn't know what she's saying," said Natalya Dmitriyevna.

We may note by the way that Natalya Dmitriyevna was right. If Zena did not consider these ladies worthy to judge her, why did she come before them with such an announcement, with such admissions? Zenaida Afanasyevna had been in too much of a hurry. This was the opinion afterwards expressed by the best minds in Mordasov. Everything might have been set right! Everything might have been smoothed over! True, Marya Alexandrovna had done herself harm that evening by her hastiness and arrogance. She should just have laughed at the imbecile old man and turned him out of the house! But Zena, running counter to all common-sense and the wisdom of Mordasov, turned to the Count.

"Count," she said to the old man, who actually rose respectfully from his chair, so great was the impression she made on him at that moment. "Forgive me, Count! Forgive us! We tricked you, we enticed you—"

"Will you be quiet, unhappy girl!" cried Marya Alexandrovna furiously.

"Madame, Madame! *Ma charmante enfant*—" muttered the astonished Count.

But the proud, impulsive, and excessively romantic disposition of Zena carried her far beyond the requirements of conventional decorum. She forgot all about her mother, who was writhing in anguish beneath her revelations.

"Yes, Count, we both tricked you. Mamma, by trying to force you to marry me, and I by consenting to it. You were plied with drink, I consented to sing and dissemble before you. You, weak and defenceless, have been

hoodwinked, as Pavel Alexandrovich put it, hoodwinked for your wealth, your rank of Count. It has all been appallingly base and I repent it. But I swear to you, Count, that I resolved upon this baseness from no base motive. I wanted—but never mind that! It would be doubly base to attempt to justify oneself in such a matter. But I assure you, Count, that if I had taken anything from you, I would have made myself your plaything in return, your servant, your dancing girl, your slave—I had sworn to do this and I would have kept my vow—”

Just then she was checked by a violent spasm in her throat. All the guests were listening as if petrified, with their eyes bulging. Zena's unexpected and perfectly incomprehensible action had utterly bewildered them. The Count alone was moved to tears, though he only understood half of what Zena said.

“I will marry you, *ma belle enfant*, since you wish it so greatly,” he murmured, “and it will be a great honour for me! But I think it was all a dream, I do really! But what does it matter what I dream? Do not let it trouble you so. I don't believe I understand a thing, *mon ami*,” he continued, turning to Mozglyakov. “Tell me what it's all about, I beg you!”

“And you, Pavel Alexandrovich,” said Zena, also turning to Mozglyakov. “You whom I at one time had made up my mind to regard as my future husband, you who have now so cruelly revenged yourself, how could you join all these people for the sake of torturing and dishonouring me? And you said you loved me! But it is not for me to preach to you! I am more to blame than you! I insulted you, for I did draw you on with promises, and what I told you then was all lies and a web of deceit. I never loved you, and if I made up my mind to marry you it was simply to get away from here somehow, to get away from this accursed town, to escape from this stench. . . . But I assure you if I had married you I would

have made you a good and faithful wife. You have revenged yourself on me cruelly, and if that is flattering to your pride—”

“Zenaida Afanasyevna!” exclaimed Mozglyakov.

“If you still cherish hatred for me—”

“Zenaida Afanasyevna!”

“If you ever,” continued Zena, restraining her tears, “if you ever loved me—”

“Zenaida Afanasyevna!”

“Zena! Zena! My daughter!” wailed Marya Alexandrovna.

“I am a scoundrel, Zenaida Afanasyevna, and nothing more!” cried Mozglyakov, amidst general excitement. Exclamations of astonishment and indignation were heard, but Mozglyakov stood as if rooted to the spot, his mind a blank, his voice failing him....

Weak and shallow natures, accustomed to perpetual submission to others, when they do let themselves go and raise a protest, in a word show firmness and consistency, invariably come up against a barrier, a limit to their firmness and consistency. Their protest is usually at first extremely energetic. This energy may even grow to frenzy. They throw themselves headlong against obstacles, closing their eyes, undertaking a burden too heavy for them. But once they have reached a certain point, such infuriated people, as if taking fright at their own fury, suddenly pull themselves up, quite overwhelmed, asking themselves the dreadful question: “What have I done?” then they turn sentimental, demand explanations, go down on their knees, implore forgiveness, beg for everything to be as it was before, and with the utmost expedition. This is almost exactly what now happened to Mozglyakov. After his first fit of fury, in which he had caused a disaster for which he now blamed no one but himself, after having wreaked his indignation and sated his vanity, for which he was now ready to hate himself,

he suddenly checked himself, crushed by remorse, on hearing Zena's unexpected revelations. Her last words quite finished him off. To rush from one extreme to another was the work of a moment.

"I'm an ass, Zenaida Afanasyevna!" he cried in a fit of violent repentance. "An ass? That would be nothing! I'm infinitely worse than an ass! But I will show you, Zenaida Afanasyevna, I will show you that an ass can be a noble person! Uncle! I have deceived you! It was I, I who deceived you! You were not asleep. You proposed in sober fact, and I, I, scoundrel that I am, assured you, in revenge for having been refused myself, that it was all a dream."

"We seem to be in for the most extraordinary revelations!" Natalya Dmitriyevna hissed in the ear of Anna Nikolayevna.

"Calm yourself, my dear boy," replied the Count. "You quite frighten me with your cries. I assure you you are mistaken—I am quite ready to get married if necessary. But you yourself told me it was only a dream—"

"Oh, how am I to convince you! Teach me how to convince him now! Uncle! Uncle! This is important, a most important family affair! Think! Consider!"

"Very well, my friend! I will think it over. Wait a minute, let me remember it just as it happened! First I dreamed of my coachman Feofil—"

"Oh, never mind Feofil now, Uncle!"

"Yes, yes, never mind him now! Then there was Napoleon, and after that we seemed to be having tea, and some lady came in and ate up all the sugar...."

"But, Uncle!" groaned Mozglyakov, hardly knowing what he said. "Why it was Marya Alexandrovna who told you about Natalya Dmitriyevna! I was there myself. I heard her myself. I was hiding and peeping at you through a chink—"

"What!" exclaimed Natalya Dmitriyevna. "You told the Count I stole sugar out of your bowl! So I go to you to steal sugar, do I?"

"Out of my sight!" shouted Marya Alexandrovna, driven to despair.

"None of that, Marya Alexandrovna! Don't you dare to say that! So I stole your sugar, did I? I heard long ago that you were spreading abominable tales about me. Sofya Petrovna told me all about it—so I steal your sugar, do I?"

"Mesdames!" exclaimed the Count. "It was only a dream! A person may dream about anything!"

"Accursed tub!" muttered Marya Alexandrovna under her breath.

"So I'm a tub, am I?" squealed Natalya Dmitriyevna. "And what do you think you are? I've known for a long time that you called me a tub. I at least have a proper husband, and you only have a poor fool—"

"Yes, yes! A tub! I remember," murmured the Count involuntarily, remembering his recent conversation with Marya Alexandrovna.

"What, and you, too, abuse a lady of birth? How dare you abuse a lady of birth, Count? If I'm a tub, then you are a one-legged cripple!"

"Me—one-legged—"

"Yes, yes, one-legged and toothless into the bargain, that's what you are!"

"And one-eyed, too!" shouted Marya Alexandrovna.

"You have a corset instead of ribs," added Natalya Dmitriyevna.

"Your face is on springs!"

"You have no hair of your own!"

"And the old fool's moustache is artificial, too," contributed Marya Alexandrovna.

"At least leave me my nose, Marya Alexandrovna!" cried the Count, flabbergasted by such unexpected reve-

lations. "It's quite real. My friend, was it you who betrayed me—you told them that my hair is false—"

"Oh, Uncle!"

"No, my friend, I can't stay here any longer! Take me away! *Quelle société!* Where have you taken me, dear God?"

"Imbecile! Villain!" shouted Marya Alexandrovna.

"Dear God!" said the unfortunate Count. "I can't quite remember what I came here for, but I shall remember in a minute. Take me away, brother, take me away, or they'll tear me to pieces! Besides . . . I must absolutely write down a new thought—"

"Come with me, Uncle, it's not too late. I'll take you at once to a hotel and move there myself—"

"Yes, yes, to a hotel. *Adieu, ma charmante enfant*—you—you alone—are virtuous. You are a noble girl! Come along, my dear boy. Oh, my God!"

But I will not describe the finale of the unpleasant scene which took place after the Count's departure. The guests dispersed with squeals and abuse, and Marya Alexandrovna was at last alone amidst the ruins and fragments of her former glory. Alas! Power, glory, distinction—all had vanished in a single evening. Marya Alexandrovna realized that she would never again rise to her former heights. The prolonged tyranny she had for so many years exercised over the whole of society had crumbled for ever. What now remained to her? To philosophize? But she did not philosophize. She raged the whole night through. Zena dishonoured, an endless stream of backbiting! Horrors!

As a faithful historian I am bound to mention that it was Afanasy Matveich who suffered the most in the aftermath, and finally crept into some closet where he shivered till morning. But when morning at last came it brought no consolation. Troubles never come singly.

CHAPTER XV

When fate once marks a person out for disaster, its blows never cease. This has long been remarked. The shame and dishonour of the day before were not all that Marya Alexandrovna was to endure. No, fate reserved something bigger and better for her.

Before ten o'clock in the morning a strange and almost incredible rumour spread over the town, and was received with the most spiteful, the most malicious delight by all, as we usually receive any outstanding scandal about our neighbours. "To be so utterly lost to shame, so unscrupulous!" came from all sides, "to stoop so low, to ignore all decency, to let oneself go to such an extent!" and so on and so forth. This is what had happened. Early in the morning, soon after six o'clock, a pale, piteous old woman appeared in despair and tears at the house of Marya Alexandrovna and implored the maid-servant to wake up her young mistress that very moment, nobody but her young mistress, and very quietly so that Marya Alexandrovna should not hear. Zena, pale and downcast, ran out to the old woman at once. The latter fell at her feet, kissed them, bathed them in her tears, and implored her to go back with her at once to her sick Vasya who had been taken so bad, so bad, all night, that perhaps he would not live out the day. The old woman told Zena through her sobs that Vasya himself had asked her to come and bid him farewell in the hour of death, in the name of all the holy angels, of all that had taken place between them, and vowing that if she did not come he would die in despair. Zena immediately made up her mind to go to him despite the fact that the fulfilment of such a request must inevitably confirm all the former malicious rumours about the inter-

cepted letter, her scandalous behaviour, and the rest. Without saying a word to her mother, she threw a cloak round her shoulders and hastened off with the old woman, right across the town, to one of the poorest districts of Mordasov, till they got to a remote street in which, looking as if it were sinking into the earth, there stood a crooked dilapidated house, with slits for windows, beset with snow-drifts on all four sides.

In this hovel, in a tiny low-ceilinged, unsavoury room, with a huge stove which took up exactly half the space, on an unpainted board bed, with a mattress as flat as a pancake, lay a young man covered by a threadbare greatcoat. His face was pale and ravaged, his eyes shone feverishly, his arms were as thin and dry as sticks. His breathing was painful and hoarse. He had obviously been good-looking once. But disease had distorted the refined features of his handsome face, which, like the face of all consumptives, or, rather of all dying men, inspired fear and pity. His old mother, who had been expecting for a whole year, almost up to the last moment, to witness the recovery of her Vasya, at last realized that he was not destined to live. She now stood beside him, broken with grief, her hands folded, tearless, gazing at him with all her eyes and yet unable to believe, though she knew it, that in a few days her beloved Vasya would be beneath the frozen ground, beneath the snow-drifts, in the wretched cemetery. But Vasya was not looking at her at that moment. His whole face, wasted and suffering, shone with bliss. He saw at last, at his side, her whom he had been dreaming of for a year and a half, whether awaking or sleeping, during the long hard nights of his illness. He understood that she had forgiven him, appearing before him like an angel of God at his last hour. She pressed his hands, wept over him, smiled at him, once more turned

her glorious eyes upon him, and all the past, which was never to return, rose anew in the heart of the dying man. Life burned once more in his heart as if before leaving him it wished the sufferer to feel how hard the parting with it would be.

"Zena!" said he, "dear Zena! Do not weep for me, do not grieve, do not mourn, do not remind me that I am soon to die! I will look at you as I am now looking at you, I will feel that our souls are together again, that you have forgiven me. I will kiss your hands again as before and perhaps I shall pass away without noticing that I die. You have grown thin, Zena! My angel, how kindly you now look at me! Do you remember how you used to laugh? Do you remember—oh, Zena, I do not ask your forgiveness, I do not wish to remember what has passed, because, Zena dear, because, though you may have forgiven me, I can never forgive myself. There have been long nights, Zena, sleepless, terrible nights, and during those nights, here on this very bed, I have lain and thought, thought long, of many things, have long decided that it was better for me to die, much better! I am not fit to live, Zena dear!"

Zena wept and pressed his hands in silence as if trying to prevent him from talking thus.

"Why do you weep, my angel?" continued the sick man. "Because I am dying—only for that? But everything else has long died, long been buried. You are wiser than me, your heart is purer, and you must have known for a long time that I was a bad man. Can you still go on loving me? And what it cost me to think that you knew me for what I was—a bad, shallow man! How my vanity—or was it a noble pride?—suffered. . . . I can never tell you! Oh, my dear one, my whole life has been a dream. I have always dreamed, not lived, and I was proud of myself, despised the crowd, though why I thought myself better than others I do not know. For purity of heart, nobil-

ity of feelings? But that all belonged to dreams, Zena, when we read Shakespeare together. When it came to real life, I showed what my purity and nobility were worth—”

“Enough,” said Zena, “enough! It wasn’t really like that, you shouldn’t take it to heart so!”

“Why do you stop me, Zena? I know you have forgiven me, perhaps you forgave me long ago. But you must have judged me, have seen what I was. It is that which tortures me. I am not worthy of your love, Zena! You were honest and magnanimous in real life. You went to your mother and told her you would marry me and none other, and kept your word, for with you, words and deeds are not separated. But I, I! When it came to deeds—do you know, Zena, I did not even understand what you would sacrifice in marrying me. I was unable then to understand that, in marrying me, you would perhaps die of starvation. It never entered into my head! All I thought was that you would marry me, a great poet (in the future, of course), and I would not try to understand your reasons for wishing to postpone our wedding; I tortured you, tyrannized over you, reproached you, despised you, and at last went so far as to hold that letter over your head. I wasn’t even a villain at that moment. I was simply a worthless individual. How you must have despised me! Oh, it’s a good thing I’m dying! It’s a good thing you never married me! I would never have understood the sacrifice you made, I would have tormented you, tortured you because of our poverty! Years would have passed and—who knows—perhaps I would have hated you for being in my way. It is better as it is. Now at least my heart has been cleansed with bitter tears. Oh, Zena! Love me just a little, as you used to love me! Just for this last hour. I know I am not worthy of your love, but . . . but . . . oh, my angel!”

Throughout this speech Zena, sobbing herself, tried to check him. But he did not heed her, he was torn by the desire to say everything, and he went on talking, though with difficulty, gasping, in a hoarse, strangled voice.

"If you had never met me, never loved me, you would still be alive," said Zena. "Oh, why, why did we ever meet!"

"No, my beloved, no, do not reproach yourself with my death," continued the sick man. "I alone have been to blame for all! How much vanity there was in it! Romanticism! Have you been told my whole foolish story, Zena? You know the year before last there was a prisoner here, on trial, a miscreant and a murderer. But when the time came for his execution he showed himself an utter coward. Knowing that a sick man would not be executed, he got hold of vodka, let some tobacco soak in it, and drank it. He coughed up such a lot of blood for such a long time that his lungs were affected. He was transferred to the hospital and a few months after died of virulent consumption. And oh, my love, I thought of that prisoner that day—after the letter, you know—and decided to kill myself. But why, do you suppose, I chose consumption? Why did I not hang myself? or drown myself? Was I afraid of a too rapid death? There may have been something of that, of course, but I cannot help thinking, Zena, that even here I could not get away from sweet romantic folly. Even then I could not help thinking—how picturesque it would be for me to lie on my bed dying of consumption, and you grieving, suffering, to think you had driven me to consumption. You would come to me begging my forgiveness, you would fall on your knees before me.... I would forgive you and die in your arms.... How foolish, Zena, wasn't it?"

"Forget all that," said Zena. "Don't talk about it.

You're not like that, really. Let's think of something else, of the days we had together."

"I am sad, my dear, that's why I recall it. I haven't seen you for a year and a half! I feel as if I could open my whole soul to you! All that time, ever since, I have been quite alone, and I don't think there has been a moment when I did not think of you, my beautiful angel! And if you only knew, Zena, how I longed to do something, somehow deserve that you should change your opinion of me. Up to the very last I never believed I would die. After all, it's not the first time I've been ill, I went about for a long time with a weak chest. And what absurd ideas I indulged in! I dreamed for instance of suddenly becoming a great poet, and having a poem printed in *Otechestvenniye Zapiski*, such as has never before been seen. I thought I would pour out all my feelings in it, my whole soul, so that wherever you were I should always be with you, perpetually reminding you of myself by my verses, and my favourite dream was that one day you would think things over and say: 'No! He's not such a bad man as I thought!' Foolish, Zena, wasn't it?"

"No, no, Vasya, no!" said Zena.

She fell on his breast and kissed his hands.

"And how jealous I was of you all that time! I think I would have died if I had heard you were going to be married. I tried to find out all your news, I kept a watch on you, spied, spied . . . I kept sending her." (Here he nodded towards his mother.) "You didn't love Mozglyakov, did you, Zena? Oh, my beloved! Will you ever think of me after I am dead? I know you will. But time will pass, your heart will grow cool, a chill will set in, the winter of the soul, and you will forget me, Zena dear!"

"No, no, never! And I will never even marry. You are my first . . . my all—"

"Everything dies, Zena, even memories.... And our loftiest thoughts die. In their places comes reason. Why murmur? Enjoy life, Zena, live long, be happy! Love another, if love you must, one cannot love a dead man. But think of me, if only now and then. Forget what was wrong, forgive the wrong. There was something good in our love, wasn't there, Zena? Oh, golden irretrievable days—listen, my love, I always loved the evening sunset hour. Remember me sometimes, at that hour. Oh, no, no! Why should one die! Oh, how I should like to have my life over again! Remember, my dear one, remember, remember those days! It was spring-time then, the sun shone so brightly, the flowers blossomed, all round us was high festival. And now! Look, oh, look!"

The unfortunate man pointed with his withered hand to the dim frozen window-pane. Then he seized Zena's hands, pressed them against his eyelids, and sobbed bitterly. His sobs almost burst his anguished breast.

He suffered all day, grieving and weeping. Zena consoled him as best she could, but she, too, fell sick unto death. She told him she would never forget him and that no one had ever been loved as he had. He believed her, smiled, kissed her hands, but memories of the past only tortured his heart the more. Thus passed a whole day. In the meantime the terrified Marya Alexandrovna sent for Zena again and again, implored her to come home and not ruin herself finally in the eyes of the world. At last, when it was already quite dark, almost out of her mind with horror, she resolved to go for Zena herself. Calling her daughter into the next room she begged her almost on her knees, "to remove this last and worst dagger from her heart." Zena went out to her feeling quite ill, with a burning forehead. She listened to her mother without understanding what she said. At last Marya Alexandrovna went away in despair, for Zena had resolved to spend the night in the house of the dying man.

All night she never left his bedside. But the patient grew worse and worse. Day came, but there was no longer any hope that the sufferer would survive it. The old mother was crazed, going about as if she understood nothing, offering her son medicine which he would not take. The agony lasted long. He could no longer speak, and only disconnected, hoarse sounds escaped from his breast. Up to the very last moment he gazed at Zena, ever seeking her glance, and when the light in his eyes grew dim he still sought for her hand with wandering uncertain fingers, to press it in his own. Meanwhile the short winter day was rapidly passing. And when at last the final expiring ray of sunshine gilded the single frozen window of the tiny room, the sufferer's soul fled from his tortured body. The old mother, seeing at last before her the corpse of her beloved Vasya, threw up her hands, shrieked, and fell on the dead man's breast.

"It was you, you viper, who ruined him!" she screamed at Zena in her desperation. "You wicked mischief-maker, you witch!"

But Zena no longer heard anything, she stood beside the corpse as if crazed. At last she bent over him, made the sign of the cross, kissed him, and walked blindly out of the room. Her eyes were burning, her head reeled—her agonizing sensations, the two almost sleepless nights, had all but deprived her of her reason. She felt vaguely that her whole past had been torn out of her heart, and that a new life, sombre and menacing, lay before her. But she had not gone ten paces when Mozglyakov suddenly sprang up in her way as if from nowhere. He seemed to have been waiting for her in this place.

"Zenaida Afanasyevna," he began in a timid whisper, looking hastily round, for it was still fairly light. "Zenaida Afanasyevna, I'm an ass, of course! Or rather,

if you like, I'm no longer an ass, for you see after all I have behaved magnanimously. Still I repent that I was an ass—I seem to be getting muddled, Zenaida Afanasyevna, but you must forgive me, it comes from various causes."

Zena looked at him as if she did not see him and continued on her way in silence. Since there was no room for two people to walk abreast on the high wooden pavement, and Zena did not make way, Pavel Alexandrovich jumped into the road and ran beside her at a lower level, peeping incessantly into her face.

"Zenaida Afanasyevna," he continued, "I have been thinking, and if you wish it I am willing to renew my proposal. I am even prepared to forget all, Zenaida Afanasyevna, all the disgrace, and to forgive, but only on one condition—so long as we are here, everything must remain a secret. You will go away as soon as possible. I will follow you on the quiet. We will get married in some remote spot, where there is no one to see us, and then go straight to Petersburg, by stages if necessary, taking with us only a little travelling bag—eh? Do you consent, Zenaida Afanasyevna? Tell me, quick! I cannot wait—we might be seen together."

Zena made no reply and only looked at him, but looked at him in such a way that he immediately understood all and, taking off his hat, bowed and disappeared at the next turning.

"What does it mean!" he wondered. "Only the day before last she spoke with such feeling, taking all the blame on herself. Apparently no two days are alike!"

In the meantime event followed event in Mordasov. There was one tragic incident. The Count, transferred by Mozglyakov to the hotel, fell ill the same night, and his illness proved dangerous. The Mordasovites heard about it the next morning. Kallist Stanislavich scarcely

left the patient's side. Towards evening a consultation attended by all the doctors in Mordasov was held. The invitations to it were written in Latin. But despite the Latin the Count's mind wandered hopelessly, and he raved, begging Kallist Stanislavich to sing him some song, and babbling about some wigs or other. Sometimes he seemed to take fright and cried out. The doctors said the Mordasov hospitality had caused the Count an intestinal inflammation, which had flown (apparently on the way) to his brains. The effects of a certain moral shock were also hinted at. The conclusion arrived at was that the Count had long had a disposition to die and was therefore bound to die. In this latter they were not mistaken, for the poor old fellow died on the evening of the third day in the hotel. The news was a bolt from the blue to the Mordasovites. No one had anticipated such a serious turn to affairs. People crowded into the hotel where the dead body lay, though not yet in state; they argued, moralized, wagged their heads, and ended by harshly condemning the murderers of the unfortunate Count, by which they meant of course Marya Alexandrovna and her daughter. Everyone felt that this affair, so scurrilous in its nature, was capable of unpleasant interpretation, might spread far and wide, and there was no limit to the things they said and predicted! All this time Mozglyakov fussed and worried, rushed hither and thither, till his head was in a continual whirl. It was in this state that he had seen Zena. His position was certainly no easy one. It was he who had brought the Count to the town, and transferred him to the hotel, and he did not know what to do with the deceased now, how and where to bury him, whom to inform, whether to have the body taken to Dukhanovo. After all, he considered himself his nephew. He shuddered lest he should be accused of the venerable old man's death. "The matter might even be heard of in Petersburg society," he told himself, trem-

bling. There was no advice to be obtained from anyone in Mordasov. Everybody suddenly took fright, retreated from the dead body and left Mozglyakov in morose solitude. But very soon the situation was entirely changed. The next day, early in the morning, a visitor arrived in the town. In the twinkling of an eye everyone was talking about this visitor, but talking about him mysteriously, in low whispers, peering at him from chinks and windows, when he went down the main street to the Governor's house. The Governor himself was alarmed and did not know what tone to assume in speaking to the visitor.

The visitor was Prince Shchepetilov, of whom almost everyone had heard, a relative of the deceased, a man still almost young, thirty-five at the most, with a colonel's epaulettes and shoulder-knots, at the sight of which all the officials were seized by the most extraordinary alarm. The chief of the police, for example, quite lost his head—figuratively speaking, of course, for in reality he was there, head and all, even if he held it none too high. It was learned at once that Shchepetilov had come from Petersburg, having visited Dukhanovo on the way. Finding nobody there, he had pursued his uncle to Mordasov, where, much to his surprise, he had received the news of the old man's death, together with the most circumstantial rumours as to its cause. The Governor, while giving the necessary explanations, could not avoid a feeling of some embarrassment, and everyone in Mordasov went about with a hangdog look. Moreover, the newly arrived visitor had such a severe, displeased expression on his face—hard as it may seem to imagine that anyone should be displeased to inherit a fortune! He immediately set to work on his late uncle's affairs, going into everything himself. Mozglyakov retreated into the background with humiliating alacrity as soon as the real nephew appeared on the scene, and was not seen again.

It was resolved to have the dead man transferred immediately to the monastery, where the funeral service was to be held. All the orders of the visitor were delivered in a manner which was brusque, cold, and severe, but perfectly civil and decorous. The next day the whole town gathered at the monastery for the funeral. An absurd rumour circulated among the ladies that Marya Alexandrovna would appear at the church and implore pardon on her knees before the coffin, and that this was in accordance with the requirements of the law. This was, of course, all nonsense, and Marya Alexandrovna did not even go to the church. We forgot to say that when Zena came home, her mamma decided to go to the country that very night, considering it impossible to stay in town any longer. There, in a perpetual fever of anxiety, she listened from her seclusion to the town rumours, sending scouts to inquire about the newcomer. The road from the monastery to Dukhanovo lay less than a mile from the windows of her country-house, and Marya Alexandrovna was able to watch at her ease the long procession returning after the church service to Dukhanovo. The coffin was placed on a high bier, after which stretched a long train of carriages, accompanying the deceased as far as the turning which led to the town. The sombre bier stood out black against the snowy fields for a long time, proceeding at a slow majestic pace. But Marya Alexandrovna could not stand the sight and soon turned away from the window.

The next week she moved to Moscow with her daughter and Afanasy Matveich, and a month later it was known in Mordasov that Marya Alexandrovna's suburban estate and town house were for sale. And so Mordasov lost for ever its most *comme il faut* lady! Even this news came with the usual accompaniment of slander. It was, for instance, asserted that Afanasy Matveich was to be thrown in with the estate. One year passed,

and another, and Marya Alexandrovna was almost completely forgotten. Alas, this has ever been the way of the world! It was said, however, that she had bought another estate, and moved to another provincial town, where, of course, she had already subjected everyone to her rule, that Zena was still unmarried, and that Afanasy Matveich—but what's the good of repeating such rumours? They are all so unreliable.

Three years have passed since I closed the first section of the annals of Mordasov, and who could have believed that I should have to open my manuscript again to add one more item to my narrative! But to go back to my story. I will begin with Pavel Alexandrovich Mozglyakov. After slinking out of Mordasov he went straight to Petersburg where he was fortunate enough to secure the post he had long been promised. He very soon forgot all about the tragic events in Mordasov, and plunged into the whirl of society life on the Vasilyevsky Island and Galernaya harbour, living fast, courting, keeping up with age, falling in love, proposing, till, unable to endure the mortification of yet another rejection, he got himself sent, from inherent frivolity and sheer idleness, on a mission to one of the remotest districts of our boundless native land, for the purpose of inspection or something of the sort, what exactly, I cannot say. The mission traversed in safety innumerable forests and wastelands and at last, after prolonged wanderings, arrived at the principal town of the "remote district," and paid its respects to the governor-general, a tall, lean, austere individual, wounded in battle, with two stars and a white cross on his breast. The Governor received the mission with pomp and circumstance and invited all its members to a ball at his house to be held that very evening, it being the name-day of his wife. Pavel Alexandrovich was well con-

tent. Attired in his Petersburg clothes, in which he hoped to produce an effect, he entered the ball-room with easy familiarity, which however received a certain check at the sight of such numbers of heavily braided and intricately curved epaulettes, and so many civil uniforms adorned with stars. His immediate duty was to make his bow to the Governor's wife, of whose youth and beauty he had already heard. He walked up airily enough, but was suddenly almost petrified with astonishment. Before him stood Zena, in a gorgeous ball dress and diamonds, proud and aloof. She did not recognize Pavel Alexandrovich. Her glance roved indifferently over his features and she turned at once to the next comer. Mozglyakov stepped aside in amazement, and jostled in the crowd against a timid youthful official who seemed to be quite terrified to find himself at the governor-general's ball. Pavel Alexandrovich instantly began questioning him and learned much that was excessively interesting. He learned that the governor-general, while visiting Moscow from the "remote district," two years ago, had married an extremely wealthy young woman of good family; that the governor-general's lady was vastly good-looking, in fact a regular beauty, but that she bore herself with great *hauteur*, and danced with no one but generals; that at this ball there would be as many as nine generals, including some only on a visit to the town, and some who were only Councillors of State; and finally, that the governor-general's lady had a mother who lived with her, and that this mother came from the best society and was very clever, but that she submitted implicitly to the will of her daughter; and the governor-general himself fairly worshipped his wife. Mozglyakov threw out a hint regarding Afanasy Matveich, but no one in the "remote district" knew anything about him. After giving himself time to recover his equanimity, Mozglyakov strolled through the rooms, where he soon

caught sight of Marya Alexandrovna, dressed up to the nines, and wielding an expensive fan, while maintaining a lively discourse with a personage who obviously stood on one of the top rungs of the social ladder. Around her crowded a number of ladies, whom Marya Alexandrovna appeared to be treating with remarkable indulgence. Mozglyakov ventured to introduce himself. Marya Alexandrovna gave an imperceptible start, but immediately, almost instantaneously, recovered. She civilly deigned to recognize Pavel Alexandrovich, inquired after certain Petersburg acquaintances, and asked him why he was not abroad. Of Mordasov she said not a word, as if it had never existed. At last, after naming an important personage in Petersburg, and inquiring after his health, though Mozglyakov had never heard of him, she turned ever so slightly towards a high official with perfumed grey hair, coming up to her, and a moment later had completely forgotten Pavel Alexandrovich, who was left standing by her chair.

Smiling sarcastically and holding his hat in his hands, Mozglyakov turned back to the ball-room. Choosing to consider himself offended, if not insulted, he decided not to dance. The morose abstracted air, the Mephistophelian smile never left his face the whole evening. Leaning against a column in a picturesque pose (there were actually columns in the ball-room, which seemed to have been put there on purpose to make the picture complete), throughout the dances, for several hours on end, he stood in one place, following Zena with his eyes. But alas, all his ruses, his picturesque poses, disillusioned air, and the rest, were in vain! Zena did not even notice him. At last, infuriated, his feet aching from standing still so long, famished—for his role of suffering lover would not of course allow of his staying for supper—he returned to his quarters, utterly worn out, feeling as if he had undergone a severe beating.

He did not go to bed for a long time, but sat going over the distant past in his mind. The next morning a certain post fell vacant, and Mozglyakov joyfully proposed himself for it. As soon as he had left the town behind him he felt quite refreshed. The snow lay like a dazzling white shroud on the endless plain. On the horizon, at the edge of the snowy desert, was a dark line of forests.

The spirited steeds galloped on, scattering the snow beneath their hoofs. The sleigh bells tinkled. Pavel Alexandrovich fell into a reverie, then began to daydream, and finally slept peacefully. He was at the third posting station when he waked up, fresh, healthy, his thoughts quite changed.



MOST UNFORTUNATE

This unfortunate incident occurred just when there began, with such irrepressible *élan*, such a naive and touching impulse, the renaissance of our esteemed native land, just when the thoughts of all its valiant sons were directed towards new destinies and aspirations. One clear frosty winter evening, the hour being close on midnight, three highly respectable gentlemen sat in a comfortably, even luxuriously furnished room in a certain excellent two-storey mansion on the Petersburg side,* absorbed in weighty and lofty converse on a most interesting topic. All three gentlemen had the rank of General. They were seated around a small table, each in a fine cushioned armchair, quietly and comfortably sipping champagne as they conversed. The bottle was on the table, in a silver bucket half full of ice. The meeting had come about owing to the fact that the host, Privy Councillor Stepan Nikiforovich Nikiforov, a confirmed bachelor of sixty-five, was celebrating both his installation in the house he had just purchased, and his birthday, which happened to coincide, and which he had never before celebrated. It was not much of a celebration, of course. As we have already seen there were only two guests, both of them former colleagues and subordinates of Mr. Nikiforov and both of them Councillors of State—their names were Semyon Ivanich Shipulenko and Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky. They had arrived at about nine for tea,

* Old Petersburg was divided by its waterways in four parts: the Viborg, Petersburg, Vasilyevskaya, and Admiralty "sides."—*Tr.*

and then had started on the champagne, knowing that at half past eleven sharp they would have to go home, for their host was a confirmed lover of regular hours. A few words about him—he had started on his career as a humble, hard-up official, had quietly performed drudging tasks for forty-five years, perfectly aware of the rank which he would attain, had not the slightest intention of aiming at the stars in heaven, though he already had two on his coat lapel, and in particular was not fond of coming out, on any subject whatever, with his private opinion. He was honest, that is to say, he had never found it necessary to do anything particularly dishonest; he was a bachelor, from sheer selfishness; he was no fool, though he never showed off; most of all he hated disorderliness and enthusiasm, which latter he considered moral disorderliness, and towards the end of his life had quite sunk into a kind of charmed, lazy comfort and perpetual solitude. He did sometimes visit people of the better sort, but from his youth had always disliked entertaining in his own home, and of late, when he did not play grand patience, contented himself with the company of his clock, imperturbably listening for evenings on end to its ticking under the glass dome on the mantelpiece. In appearance he was perfectly respectable, he was clean-shaven, did not look his age, was well preserved, and gave promise of living a long time yet; and he behaved in the most severely gentlemanly manner. His post was a fairly comfortable one, he attended certain sessions, and signed certain papers. In a word he passed for an excellent man. He had only one passion, or, rather, one ardent desire—to possess a house of his own, and a real gentleman's house, not just a solid dwelling. This desire was at last fulfilled, he had chosen and purchased a house on the Petersburg side, rather far out, it is true, but a house with a garden, and, what is more, this house was extremely elegant. The new owner

argued that the further out he lived, the better, since he was not fond of receiving guests in his home, and for visits and going to his office he had a fine chocolate-coloured carriage to seat two, a coachman named Mikhiei, and a pair of small but sturdy and handsome horses. All this was the fruit of forty years of niggling economy, and he could therefore rejoice in it wholeheartedly. That is why, having purchased the house and moved in, Stepan Nikiforovich felt such content in his tranquil heart that he actually invited guests on his birthday, a date he had hitherto carefully concealed from his most intimate friends. As a matter of fact he had certain views in regard to one of his guests. He himself only occupied the top storey of his house, and he needed a tenant for the lower storey, which was laid out in exactly the same way. Stepan Nikiforovich quite counted on Semyon Ivanich Shipulenko, and had twice turned the conversation to this subject during the evening. But Semyon Ivanich had found nothing to say about it. He, too, was a man who had carved out his career slowly and with difficulty; he had black hair and whiskers, and there was something permanently jaundiced in his countenance. He was married and a morose stay-at-home, keeping his family in perpetual terror, attending to his duties with the utmost confidence, and also perfectly aware of the rank he would attain, and, still better, that which he would never attain. He had a good post and he stuck to it manfully. He regarded, not without a certain rancour, the new era just beginning to dawn, but it did not cause him any particular alarm. He was confident in himself and listened to Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky's harangues on the new topics with a touch of satirical testiness. By now, it should be remarked, they were all a little under the influence of drink, and Stepan Nikiforovich himself actually condescended to enter into a slight argument with Mr. Pralinsky about the new era. We

must now say a few words about His Excellency Mr. Pralinsky, especially since it is he who is the principal character in this story.

Councillor of State Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky had only been called Your Excellency for the last four months, in a word, he was a newly-fledged General. In years, too, he was young, not more than forty-three, and he looked, and prided himself on the fact, still younger. He was a handsome man, tall, proud of his clothes and of the exquisite dignity with which he set them off, wore a distinguished order on his breast with the utmost *savoir faire*, had acquired a few aristocratic tricks of manner in his childhood, and, while remaining a bachelor, dreamed of a wealthy, perhaps even an aristocratic bride. He still indulged in dreams, though he was far from stupid. He was inclined to hold forth, and liked to fall into parliamentary poses. He came of a good family, was a General's son, and something of a fop. In his early childhood he was clad in velvet and cambric, and sent to an aristocratic school; and though he did not bring much knowledge from it, he did well in his office, and rose to the rank of General. His superiors considered him an able man, and even placed hopes in him. But Stepan Nikiforovich, under whose aegis he had begun his career, and continued it almost to the rank of General, had never considered him a particularly efficient man, and placed no hopes in him whatever. It pleased him, however, that Ivan Ilyich came of a good family, possessed property—that is to say, a large stone-built mansion managed by a steward—was related to some not undistinguished persons, and, in addition, had a good presence. In his heart Stepan Nikiforovich censured him for his heated imagination and his frivolity. Ivan Ilyich himself sometimes felt that he was over-sensitive, perhaps even touchy. What was strange was that every now and then he had unaccountable fits of a kind of morbid

remorse as if there were something about which he felt ever so slightly conscience-stricken. With bitterness and secret pangs, he sometimes realized that he had not really soared so high as he liked to think. At such moments he even fell into something like dejection, especially when his piles were giving him trouble, when he alluded to his life as *une existence manquée*, and even ceased to believe (quite privately, of course) in his parliamentary gifts, calling himself a *parleur* and a *phras-seur*; but while this was of course highly creditable, it did not in the least prevent him, half an hour later, from raising his hand, cheering up, and assuring himself still more resolutely and confidently than before, that there was still time for him to show his mettle, and that he would be not only a high official, but a statesman into the bargain, and one whom Russia would long remember. Every now and then he actually had visions of monuments. All this goes to show that Ivan Ilyich aimed high, while hiding deep in his heart, with certain misgivings, his vague dreams and aspirations. In a word, he was a good man, at heart a poet. During the last few years, moments of morbid disillusion had begun to visit him with increasing frequency. He had somehow become extremely irritable and suspicious, and was ready to regard the slightest opposition as an insult. But the new spirit in Russia instilled great hopes in him. His promotion to the rank of General confirmed them. He took heart; he held his head high. He began to talk a great deal and most eloquently, on the very latest topics, all of which he took up with remarkable rapidity and zeal. He sought opportunities of speaking, went about the town, and in many places passed for a desperate liberal, which he found immensely flattering. On this particular evening, after three or four glasses of champagne, he was in great form. He was seized by a desire to make Stepan Nikiforovich, whom he had not seen for a long time and

whom he had always respected and even submitted to, change his views on all points. For some reason he considered Stepan Nikiforovich a retrograde, and attacked him with the utmost zeal. Stepan Nikiforovich, who made hardly any attempt at defending himself, only smiled craftily, though the subject interested him. Ivan Ilyich grew warm, and in the heat of what he imagined to be a discussion, turned more often than he should have to his glass. Whenever he took a drink, Stepan Nikiforovich picked up the bottle and filled up his guest's glass, and for some reason Ivan Ilyich began suddenly to take umbrage at this, especially since Semyon Ivanich Shipulenko for whom he had a great contempt, and whom, moreover, he feared for his cynicism and bad temper, maintained a most insidious silence beside him, smiling more frequently than was strictly needed. "They seem to take me for a mere boy," flashed through the head of Ivan Ilyich.

"No. It's time, it's high time," he continued eagerly. "We have let it go on too long, and in my view humanity is the great thing. Humanity to subordinates, remembering that they too are human beings. Humanity will save everything and put everything right."

"Hee-hee-hee!" came from where Semyon Ivanich was sitting.

"But what are you scolding us so severely for?" objected Stepan Nikiforovich at last, with a courteous smile. "I confess, Ivan Ilyich, that so far I can't quite make out what you are trying to tell us. You recommend humanity. That means love for one's fellow man, doesn't it?"

"Well, yes, love for one's fellow man if you like. I—"

"Just a minute! As far as I can judge it is not a matter of this alone. Love of one's fellow creatures has always been commendable. But the reform will not confine itself to that. Questions regarding the peasantry, legal,

economic, moral and . . . and . . . any number of others have arisen, and taken all together, all at once, they may cause great . . . er . . . fluctuations. That is what makes us anxious, and not just humanity. . . .”

“Yes, sir, it goes deeper than that,” remarked Semyon Ivanich.

“I understand that very well, and allow me to remark, Semyon Ivanich, that I by no means yield to you in profundity of understanding,” said Ivan Ilyich caustically, his tone unnecessarily harsh. “I will, however, make so bold as to inform you, too, Stepan Nikiforovich, that you do not quite understand me.”

“I do not.”

“And yet I maintain and consistently pursue the idea, that humanity, especially humanity to subordinates, from the official to the clerk, from the clerk to the yardman, from the servant to the muzhik—humanity, I say, might become, as it were, the foundation stone of future reforms and the renewing of things in general. Why? Because! Take this syllogism—I am humane, therefore I am loved. I am loved, consequently I am trusted. I am trusted, consequently I am believed in. I am believed in, consequently I am loved—that is to say, I mean, if people believe, then they will believe in reform, too, they will understand, so to speak, the essence of the thing, they will embrace one another morally, so to speak, and decide everything fraternally, fundamentally. What are you laughing at, Semyon Ivanich? Haven’t I made myself clear?”

Stepan Nikiforovich silently raised his eyebrows. He was astonished.

“I’m afraid I must have had a little too much to drink,” remarked Semyon Ivanich caustically, “and am therefore a bit slow at the uptake. A temporary aberration, no doubt.”

Ivan Ilyich was quite shocked.

"We shan't be able to keep it up," said Stepan Nikiforovich suddenly, after slight reflection.

"What d'you mean we shan't be able to keep it up?" asked Ivan Ilyich astonished at Stepan Nikiforovich's unexpected and abrupt remark.

"We just won't be able to keep it up." Stepan Nikiforovich apparently had no desire to go into explanations.

"You're not thinking about new wine and new bottles, are you?" retorted Ivan Ilyich with a shade of irony. "Oh, no, sir, I will answer for myself."

Just then the clock struck half past eleven.

"Our host must think we're never going," said Semyon Ivanich, making as if to rise from his chair. But Ivan Ilyich forestalled him, getting up from the table immediately and taking his sable cap from the mantelpiece. He looked a little offended.

"Well, Semyon Ivanich, will you think it over?" said Stepan Nikiforovich, seeing his visitors out.

"About the apartment, you mean? I will, I'll think it over."

"And when you have made up your mind, let me know as soon as possible."

"A business matter, I take it," remarked Mr. Pralinsky, with a kind of obsequious courtesy, and playing with his cap. It seemed to him that they had forgotten his existence.

Stepan Nikiforovich raised his brows, but said nothing, as if to show that he had no wish to delay his guests. Semyon Ivanich hastily took his leave.

"Oh, very well, then . . . since you don't understand common civility," Mr. Pralinsky thought to himself, and extended his hand to Stepan Nikiforovich almost defiantly.

Once in the hall Ivan Ilyich wrapped his expensive light fur-coat round him, trying to look as if he did not notice Semyon Ivanich's worn racoon overcoat and they both started down the stairs.

"The old fellow seems to have taken offence," said Ivan Ilyich to the silent Semyon Ivanich.

"Oh, no—what makes you think that?" replied the latter coldly and placidly.

"Flunkey!" thought Ivan Ilyich.

They went out on to the porch. Semyon Ivanich's sleigh, drawn by a shabby grey stallion, came round.

"What the devil! What on earth has Trifon done with my carriage?" cried Ivan Ilyich not seeing his carriage anywhere.

He looked here and there, but there was no carriage. Stepan Nikiforovich's footman knew nothing about it. They asked Varlam, Semyon Ivanich's coachman, who told them that Ivan Ilyich's coachman and carriage had been there all the time, and now they weren't there any more.

"Most unfortunate!" said Mr. Shipulenko. "Can I take you?"

"Those scoundrelly servants!" cried Mr. Pralinsky frantically. "Asked leave to go to a wedding, the hound, here on the Petersburg side, some crony of his getting married, confound her. I strictly forbade him to go away. And now I'm ready to wager that's where he's gone!"

"He has," said Varlam, "that's where he went. He promised to be back in a minute, he said he'd be here by the time you came out."

"There you are! I was sure of it! I'll give it him!"

"Better send him to the police station for a good thrashing. Then he'll do what he's told," said Semyon Ivanich, covering himself up with the carriage rug.

"Please don't trouble, Semyon Ivanich!"

"Just as you like, I can easily take you."

"Good-bye, *merci!*"

Semyon Ivanich drove off and Ivan Ilyich walked away over the wooden pavement, his spirits thoroughly ruffled.

"I'll give it you, you rascal! I'll go on foot to spite you, to make you feel it, to frighten you! He'll come back and discover his master has gone on foot, the scoundrel!"

Ivan Ilyich had never before given way to his temper like this, but he really was furious, besides his head was going round. He was not a drinking man, and a mere five or six glasses affected him immediately. But it was a beautiful night, frosty, though unusually quiet and windless. The sky was clear and starry. The light of the full moon flooded the earth with a muted silvery sheen. It was so nice to be out that Ivan Ilyich after the first fifty paces almost forgot his mishap. A sensation of extraordinary well-being stole over him. When people are a little drunk their mood keeps changing. He even found some charm in the shabby little wooden houses at the side of the deserted street.

"After all, it's a good thing I went on foot," he told himself, "it'll be a lesson for Trifon, and for me it's a pleasure. I ought to walk more. I'm sure to find a droshky on Bolshoi Prospekt. What a lovely night! And just look at all these little houses! Probably that's where the small fry live, clerks . . . perhaps tradesmen. Oh, that Stepan Nikiforovich! And what retrogrades they all are, the old fogies! Fogies—*c'est le mot*. Still, he's a clever chap. He has that *bon sens*, that sober practical comprehension of things. But, oh, those old men, those old men! They lack that what's-its-name—never mind, they lack it. 'We shan't be able to keep it up'—what did he mean by that? He even paused to think before saying it. He didn't quite understand me, by the way. How could anybody help understanding? Harder not to understand than to understand. The great thing is that I am convinced, profoundly convinced. Humanity . . . love of one's fellow man. Restore human beings to themselves . . . revive their personal dignity and then . . . start afresh with ready-made material. Clear enough, I think. Yes, sir! Be

so kind, Your Excellency, as to accept the syllogism—we meet a functionary, for example, some poor, oppressed clerk. Well . . . who are you? The answer: so and so, such and such a functionary. Do you work? I do. Do you wish to be happy? I do. What do you require to make you happy? This and that. Why? Because . . . and the man understands me before I have said half a dozen words. The man is mine, the man is caught, so to speak, in the net, and I can do what I like with him, for his own good, I mean. That Semyon Ivanich is a bad lot. Very unpleasant phiz. . . . ‘Have him thrashed!’ He said it to annoy me. Oh, no, you don’t—thrash him yourself. I shan’t! I will crush Trifon with words, with reproaches. I will crush him, and he’ll feel it, you’ll see. As for the rod, h’m, an as yet unsolved problem, h’m . . . what about going to Mademoiselle Emerans? The devil—this accursed wooden pavement!” he cried, suddenly losing his footing. “And this is the capital! Enlightenment! I might have broken my leg. H’m. I detest that Semyon Ivanich—beastly phiz he has. It was he who giggled when I said ‘morally embrace.’ Well, and if they do, what’s it to you? I shan’t embrace *you*—sooner a muzhik. . . . If I meet a muzhik I shall stop and speak to him. Of course I was drunk and perhaps I didn’t express myself properly. Perhaps I’m not expressing myself properly now, either. H’m. I’ll never take anything again. It makes you chatter freely at the time, and the next day you wish you hadn’t. Still I can walk straight. . . . Still, they’re a set of scoundrels, every one of them!”

Thus argued Ivan Ilyich in broken disconnected phrases, as he continued to stride over the pavement. The fresh air had a sobering effect on him. Another five minutes and he would have calmed down and felt inclined for sleep. But suddenly, within a very few paces of the Bolshoi Prospekt, he caught the sound of music. He looked round. On the other side of the street in an ex-

tremely dilapidated wooden house, only one storey high but very long, there were sounds of merriment, fiddles scraping, a double-bass booming, and a flute shrilling out the tune of a gay quadrille. In front of the windows there was a small crowd, mostly women in padded jackets with kerchiefs on their heads, straining every nerve to see something, however little, through the chinks in the shutters. Obviously a good time was being enjoyed in there. The thudding of the dancers' feet could be heard from the opposite side of the road. Ivan Ilyich noticed a policeman not far away and went up to him.

"Whose house is that, brother?" he asked, opening his expensive coat just enough for the policeman to see the important order on his breast.

"Civil servant Pseldonimov's, he's a registrar," replied the policeman, drawing himself up. He had at once noticed the sign of distinction.

"Pseldonimov? Ha! Pseldonimov! What's going on? Is it his wedding?"

"Yes, Your Excellency, he's marrying the titular councillor's daughter. Mlekopitayev, titular councillor—used to serve on the Municipal Council. The house goes with the bride."

"Ah, so the house is Pseldonimov's now, and not Mlekopitayev's."

"Pseldonimov's, Your Excellency. It used to be Mlekopitayev's and now it's Pseldonimov's."

"H'm. I ask you this, brother, because I am his chief. I'm a General in the office where Pseldonimov works."

"Very good, Your Excellency!" The policeman drew himself up still straighter, but Ivan Ilyich seemed to be lost in thought. He stood there, thinking.

Yes, Pseldonimov really did belong to his department in his own office. He remembered now. He was a petty official with a salary of about ten rubles a month. Mr. Pralinsky had taken over the office quite recently, and

could scarcely have known everything about all his subordinates, but Pseldonimov he remembered, precisely on account of his name. It had struck him the first time he came across it, so that even then he had cast a more than ordinarily curious glance at the owner of such a name. Now he remembered a man who was still very young, with a long aquiline nose, shaggy flaxen hair, very lean and ill nourished, in an impossible uniform and "unmentionables" that were shabby to the point of indecency. He remembered how even then the thought had passed through his mind: should he not assign the poor wretch a ten-ruble note for the holiday, to get himself something to eat? But, since the poor fellow's face was so very unprepossessing and its expression so very unpleasing, incapable of arousing any feeling but disgust, the kind intentions had somehow vanished into thin air, and Pseldonimov remained unrewarded. All the greater had been the astonishment of Ivan Ilyich when this same Pseldonimov, not more than a week ago, had come to ask permission to get married. Ivan Ilyich remembered that he had had no time to look into the matter thoroughly, and that the affair of the wedding had been settled hastily and superficially. And yet he remembered quite clearly that Pseldonimov was to get a wooden house and four hundred rubles in cash with his bride; he had been struck by the circumstance at the time. He even remembered making some playful remark at the amusing conjunction of the names, both so odd—Mlekopitayev and Pseldonimov.* He remembered it all vividly.

Remembering, he fell deeper and deeper into thought. It is common knowledge that long arguments sometimes pass through our minds in a flash, in the form of sensations, without being translated into ordinary, not to mention literary, language. We will, however, endeavour

* Note: *Mlekopitayushchiye*—mammals; Pseldonimov, a corruption of pseudonym.—Tr.

to translate all these sensations of our hero and offer the reader at least the essence of them, all that was most important and comprehensible in them. For many of our sensations, when translated into ordinary language, sound very unconvincing. That is why they never emerge into the daylight, though everyone experiences them. The sensations and thoughts of Ivan Ilyich were somewhat disconnected. But then we know the reason for this.

"Well, now!" it flashed through his mind. "We do nothing but talk and talk, and when it comes to deeds, we simply thumb our noses. Take this same Pseldonimov, for example. He has just returned from the steps of the altar, agitated, hopeful, looking forward to a taste of conjugal delights. It is one of the happiest days of his life . . . now he is entertaining his guests, giving a feast—humble, poor, but cheerful, joyous, cordial. Well, now, if he could know that at this very moment I—I, his chief, his principal, am standing outside his house, listening to his music! Eh—what would he do? And what would he do if I were to walk straight in? At first, of course, he'd be taken aback, he'd be almost stunned. Perhaps I'd be in his way, upset everything. . . . Yes, that's how it would be if any other General were to walk in, but not me . . . that's just it—anyone else, but not me—

"Well, Stepan Nikiforovich, you didn't understand me, you see—here's an example for you, ready to hand!

"Oh, yes! We're always shouting about humanity, but we're incapable of heroism, of real feats. What do I mean by heroism? Simply this: given the present relations between all members of society, for me, *me*, to go after midnight to the wedding of a subordinate, a registrar, with ten rubles a month, why, that would be madness, utter confusion of ideas, the last days of Pompeii, chaos! No one would understand it. Stepan Nikiforovich will not understand it to his dying day. Why, he said—we

shan't be able to keep it up. Yes, but that's you, old folk, paralytics and retrogrades. *I'll* keep it up! I'll turn the last day of Pompeii into a day of bliss for my subordinate, an apparently crazy act into a normal, patriarchal, elevated and ethical one. How? Like this! Kindly listen!

"Well, then . . . so, let us say, I enter. They are astonished, the dancing stops, they gaze at me, the retreat a step. Very well, but here I show my hand. I go straight up to the terrified Pseldonimov with the most benevolent smile and say, in the simplest possible words: 'It's like this, you see, I was visiting His Excellency Stepan Nikiforovich. He lives quite near here, you probably know the address.' Well, and then I'll give a humorous sort of account of the adventure with Trifon. From Trifon I'll pass on to a description of my walk. 'Well, I hear music, question the policeman, and learn, brother, that you are getting married. Why not go to my subordinate's house, I think to myself, and see how my clerks make merry and . . . get married. You won't drive me away, I suppose?' Drive me away! What a word for a subordinate. Drive me away—not likely! I think he'll go mad, rush headlong to seat me in an armchair, tremble with admiration, be unable, at first, to take it all in! . . .

"Now what could be simpler or more elegant than such an act! What have I come for? That's another question! That is, so to say, the ethical side of the matter. And that's the whole beauty of it!

"H'm! What was I thinking about?

"Oh, yes . . . well, of course, they'll seat me with the most important guests, some titular councillor, or a relative, some retired captain with a red nose. . . . Gogol describes those types marvellously. Well, of course I am introduced to the bride, I pay her a compliment, encourage the guests. I beg them not to be shy, to make merry, to go on dancing, I joke, laugh, in a word, I am courteous and charming. I am always courteous and

charming when I am pleased with myself. H'm. But of course just now I am a little tipsy . . . not drunk of course, but a little. . . .

"Naturally, as a gentleman I treat them as equals, and by no means demand any special signs . . . but morally, morally, that's another question. They will understand and appreciate . . . my act will bring out all the magnanimity in them. . . . Well, I'll stay about half an hour—say an hour. I'll leave, of course, just before supper, they will bustle about, implore me, bow to the ground, but I will only drink one glass, congratulate them, and refuse to have supper. 'Business!' I'll say. And the moment I utter the word 'business' all their faces will become respectfully stern. By this I give them a gentle hint that there is a great difference between them and me. All the difference in the world! Not that I wish to give this impression, but it is necessary . . . even in the moral sense it is essential, whatever anyone says. I will smile, perhaps I'll even laugh, and then everyone will cheer up. Say something playful to the bride again. H'm—I know what I'll say—I'll hint that I shall come again in exactly nine months in the capacity of godfather, he, he! No doubt she'll bring forth punctually. They multiply like rabbits. Well, they'll all laugh, the bride will blush. I kiss her on the forehead with great feeling, even give her my blessing and . . . and tomorrow my feat will be known at the office. Tomorrow I am again severe, tomorrow I am again exacting, inexorable, in fact—but now everyone knows the sort of man I am. They have seen into my soul, they know my value. 'He is severe as a chief, but as a human being he is an angel,' they will say. And so I have gained a victory. I have scored by a paltry act which would never have come into your head. They are mine now. I am their father, they are my children. . . . Now then, Your Excellency, Stepan Nikiforovich, see if you can do a thing like that!

"Do you realize, do you understand, that Pseldonimov will tell his children how the General himself made merry, how he actually drank at their father's wedding? And those children will tell their own children, who will tell their grandchildren, as an anecdote hallowed by tradition, how a high official, a statesman (and by that time I shall be both these things) honoured their father . . . and so on and so forth. . . . Why, I shall be raising the abased, morally speaking, I shall be giving him back to himself. Why, he gets ten rubles a month! And if I repeat this five times, ten times, or something like it, then I shall gain universal popularity. . . . It will impress itself on the hearts of all, and there's no knowing what might come of it, of that popularity!"

Thus, or almost thus, argued Ivan Ilyich. (What will not a man sometimes say to himself, gentlemen? Especially if he is in a somewhat eccentric state.) All these considerations flashed through his mind in less than a minute, and it goes without saying that he might have contented himself with these trivial meditations and, mentally putting Stepan Nikiforovich to shame, have gone quietly home and laid himself down to sleep. And he would have done well! But the whole misfortune lay in the fact that the moment was one of eccentricity.

As ill luck would have it, just at that very moment the smug faces of Stepan Nikiforovich and Semyon Ivanich rose before his inflamed imagination.

"We shan't be able to keep it up," reiterated Stepan Nikiforovich constantly, smiling condescendingly.

"He-he-he!" echoed Semyon Ivanich, with his most unpleasant smile.

"We'll see if we can't keep it up!" said Ivan Ilyich resolutely, the blood rushing into his cheeks. He stepped off the pavement and strode firmly across the street to the house of his subordinate, the registrar Pseldonimov.

Led on by his evil star, he passed boldly through the open wicket gate, scornfully kicking away the small shaggy cur which, more for the look of the thing than in real earnest, threw itself at his ankles with hoarse barks. He walked up the board path to a closed porch, which jutted out into the yard like a sentry-box, and ascended three dilapidated wooden steps to the tiny entry. Somewhere in a corner there burned a tallow, candle-end or a night light of some sort, but this did not prevent Ivan Ilyich from plunging his left foot, galosh and all, in a meat jelly, set outside to cool. Ivan Ilyich bent down and, his curiosity aroused, noted that there were two other dishes there containing aspic or something, and two moulds as well—blanc mange probably. For a moment he was taken aback by the sight of the wrecked meat jelly, and for the merest fraction of a minute the thought came into his head: wouldn't it be better to beat an instant retreat? But he decided that this would be cowardly. Arguing that no one had seen him, or would dream of suspecting him, he quickly wiped his galosh to cover the traces, groped for the felt-covered door, opened it, and found himself in the tiniest of entrance halls. One half of it was literally crammed with overcoats, mantles, cloaks, capes, hats, bonnets, mufflers, and galoshes. In the other half the musicians were established—two fiddles, a flute and a double bass—four men altogether, picked up, of course, in the street. They were sitting at an unpainted deal table, lighted by a single tallow candle, conscientiously scraping out the last figure of a quadrille. Through the open door into the next room could be seen the dancers in a haze of dust, tobacco smoke, and fumes. A kind of frantic gaiety prevailed. Laughter, cries, and feminine squeals were heard. The gentlemen stamped like a cavalry squadron. Over this infernal din rose the commands of the master of ceremonies, who seemed to be quite at home, and extremely

free-and-easy. "Gentlemen in the middle, *chain des dames, balancez,*" *et cetera*. Ivan Ilyich relieved himself of overcoat and galoshes in some trepidation and went into the room. He no longer reasoned about anything.

Just at first nobody noticed him, all being absorbed in dancing the quadrille to the end. He stood there as if stunned, and could make out nothing in the crush. Ladies' dresses and young men with cigarettes between their teeth whirled past . . . a sky-blue scarf worn by a lady whirled past and brushed against the tip of Ivan Ilyich's nose. A medical student, his hair streaming wildly, rushed after her, jostling Ivan Ilyich roughly as he passed. An officer as tall as a church steeple whirled past. Someone screamed, "Oh, Pseldy dear!" in an unnaturally shrill voice, flying by and stamping in unison with the rest. The floor felt sticky to Ivan Ilyich's feet—apparently it must have been polished with wax. There were up to thirty guests in the room, which was by no means a small one.

Another minute and the quadrille came to an end, and what Ivan Ilyich had imagined, what he had dreamed about while still outside the house, came to pass almost immediately. A kind of hum, a strange whisper, swept over guests and dancers, the latter not yet having recovered their breath, and still wiping the sweat from their faces. All eyes, all faces turned swiftly towards the newly arrived guest. The moment after, all instantly backed away, tugging at the clothes of those who had not yet noticed him and calling them to order. And these, too, looked round and immediately backed with the rest. Ivan Ilyich was still standing in the doorway, not having advanced a step, while between him and the guests a bigger and bigger space was cleared, littered with innumerable *bonbon* wrappings, scraps of paper, and cigarette stubs. Suddenly a young man in an official frock-coat with wildly sticking out flaxen hair and a

hooked nose, stepped timidly on to this space. He advanced with bent shoulders, gazing at the unexpected guest exactly as a dog gazes at its master when called to be kicked.

"How d'you do, Pseldonimov—know me?" said Ivan Ilyich, and immediately felt that he had said a stupid thing. He felt, too, that he was perhaps at that very moment perpetrating the most appalling blunder.

"Y-y-y-our Excellency!" murmured Pseldonimov.

"Ah-ha! I have come to you quite by chance, brother, as you will probably realize yourself—"

But Pseldonimov was apparently in no state to realize anything whatever. He stood there, his eyes bulging in the most appalling perplexity.

"Well, I suppose you won't drive me away—whether you like it or not, receive the guest!" continued Ivan Ilyich, feeling unpardonably weak with embarrassment, and trying vainly to smile, while the idea of bringing in the story of Stepan Nikiforovich and Trifon became more and more impossible. But Pseldonimov, as if to make matters still worse, did not recover from his paralyzed state, but went on staring with an utterly imbecile air.

Ivan Ilyich winced, feeling that if he allowed things to go on like this another moment, the situation would be altogether desperate.

"I hope I don't intrude. . . . Perhaps I'd better go!" he brought out faintly, and a muscle twitched on the right side of his mouth.

But Pseldonimov had already recovered his senses.

"Oh, Your Excellency . . . an honour. . . ." he murmured, with a hurried bow. "Won't you sit down?" And finally recovering from his amazement he motioned with both hands towards the sofa, where the table usually standing beside it had been moved to make room for the dancers.

Ivan Ilyich felt a little relief and sank on to the sofa. Someone immediately dashed up and moved the table back to the sofa. Ivan Ilyich looked round and observed that he alone was seated, and that all the others, even the ladies, were standing up. A bad sign. But the time to mention this, to encourage, had not yet come. The guests were still retreating, and the only one standing beside him was the half-crouching Pseldonimov, still unable to understand anything and not smiling at all. Briefly, it was very unpleasant. At that moment our hero endured such agony that his idealistic excursion in the spirit of Harun al Rashid might in truth be considered a feat. But suddenly a small figure appeared beside Pseldonimov and began bowing. To his inexpressible pleasure, nay, to his delight, Ivan Ilyich recognized his head clerk Akim Petrovich Zubikov, a man with whom of course he was not acquainted outside the office, but whom he knew for an efficient and close-mouthed official. Ivan Ilyich rose at once and held out his hand to Akim Petrovich, his whole hand, not just two fingers. The latter took the hand in both his with an air of profound respect. The General triumphed. The situation was saved.

For this made Pseldonimov, so to speak, no longer a second, but a third person. Ivan Ilyich could address his story directly to the head clerk, of necessity treating him as an acquaintance, and that a close one, leaving Pseldonimov to hold his tongue and tremble from sheer reverence. Thus the proprieties would be observed. And the story must be told. Ivan Ilyich felt that. He could see that everyone was expecting something, that even the domestics were crowding into the two doorways, almost scrambling on to one another's shoulders, so as to see and hear. It was too bad that the head clerk, in his obtuseness, was still standing.

"Why don't you—" blurted out Ivan Ilyich, awkwardly indicating a place beside him on the sofa.

"Oh, no! I'll sit here," and Akim Petrovich quickly sat down on a chair which Pseldonimov, who remained persistently standing, leaned forward to thrust beneath him.

"Fancy, now!" began Ivan Ilyich, addressing himself exclusively to Akim Petrovich in a voice which, though shaky, was now quite free and easy. He drawled out his words, stressing every syllable, slurring his *a*'s, behaving, in a word, as he fully admitted to himself, in the most affected manner. He could not help it, he seemed to be impelled by some external force. He realized a great deal at that moment, and the realization was agony.

"Fancy, now, I've just come from Stepan Nikiforovich Nikiforov, you've probably heard of him—he's a privy councillor. On that—er—commission...."

Akim Petrovich bent his whole body forward respectfully, as if to say: Who hasn't heard of him?

"He's your neighbour now," continued Ivan Ilyich, addressing Pseldonimov for the sake of decorum and to show that he was quite at ease, but turning away hastily on reading in Pseldonimov's eyes his utter indifference to this.

"The old fellow, as you know, has dreamed all his life of buying a house. . . . Well, and so he bought one. And a very nice little house, too. Yes—and it happens to be his birthday today, and you see, he never kept it before, he even concealed it from us, denying it out of stinginess—he, he! But this time he was so pleased with his new house that he invited me and Semyon Ivanich—Shipulenko, you know."

Akim Petrovich bent forward again with inexpressible zeal. Ivan Ilyich cheered up a little. He had begun to be afraid that the head clerk had guessed that His Excellency was for the moment in dire need of his support. And nothing could be worse than that.

"Well, there we were, the three of us, champagne on the table, talking about business. You know, one thing

and another. . . . All sorts of problems. We even had a sort of argument . . . he, he!"

Akim Petrovich raised his brows respectfully.

"But that's not the point. I took leave of him, at last, the old fellow's very regular in his habits, goes to bed early, you know, in his old age. I go out . . . my Trifon's nowhere to be seen! I am quite annoyed, and ask: 'Where has Trifon taken the carriage?' It appears that, hoping I would stay later, he had gone off to the wedding of some crony or sister of his. . . . God alone knows who! Somewhere here on the Petersburg side. And what's more he must have taken the carriage." Again the General looked towards Pseldonimov for the sake of propriety. The latter writhed beneath his glance, but this was not how the General had wanted him to behave. "No real sympathy, no heart," flashed through his mind.

"Indeed!" exclaimed Akim Petrovich, in profound amazement. A low hum of surprise passed over the crowd.

"Imagine my situation—" (Ivan Ilyich glanced towards the assembled guests.) "Nothing for it, I go on foot. I'll stroll up to Bolshoi Prospekt, I think, and there I'll find a droshky, he, he!"

"He, he, he!" echoed Akim Petrovich respectfully. Again a hum, this time of merriment, in the crowd. At that moment the chimney of a lamp in a wall bracket burst with a loud report. Someone rushed forward eagerly. Pseldonimov started and looked sternly at the lamp, but the General paid not the slightest attention to it, and everyone breathed freely.

"On I go—and it's such a fine, still night. Suddenly I hear music, stamping, people dancing. I go up to the policeman—it's Pseldonimov's wedding. Well, brother, you want the whole Petersburg side to know you're giving a ball. Ha, ha!" he suddenly turned to Pseldonimov again.

"He, he, he! Quite right!" responded Akim Petrovich. The guests stirred again, but the most embarrassing thing of all was that Pseldonimov, though he bowed again, still did not smile, just as if he were made of wood.

"Is he a fool, I wonder?" thought Ivan Ilyich. "If only he'd smile, the ass! We'd get on swimmingly." Impatience seethed within him. "So I thought to myself: Why shouldn't I go and see my subordinate, I don't suppose he'll drive me away—like it or not—receive the guest! You must excuse me, brother. If I'm in the way, I'll go . . . I only just looked in—"

But gradually a movement spread over the guests. Akim Petrovich assumed an ecstatic air as if to say: how could Your Excellency be in the way? All the guests stirred and began to show the first signs of ease. Almost all the ladies were sitting down. A good sign, that. The bolder spirits among them were waving their handkerchiefs. One, in a rubbed velvet gown, purposely made some loud remark. The officer she addressed meant to answer her still louder, but since no one else was speaking loudly, he changed his mind. The men, mostly clerks and a few students, exchanged glances, as if urging one another to relax, began coughing, and even moving a step or two in various directions. As a matter of fact, nobody felt particularly shy, but they were all awkward, and most of them cherished feelings of secret hostility for the person who had burst in upon them to spoil their merriment. The officer, ashamed of his cowardice, began gradually edging his way to the table.

"Look here, brother, allow me to ask your name and patronymic?" Ivan Ilyich inquired of Pseldonimov.

"Porfiry Petrovich, Your Excellency," he replied, his eyes bulging, barking out the words as if he were answering a drill-sergeant.

"Aren't you going to introduce me to your young wife, Porfiry Petrovich? Take me to her."

And he made as if to get up, but Pseldonimov rushed headlong into the drawing-room. The bride, by the way, had been standing in the doorway, but as soon as she heard her name, she hid. A moment later, Pseldonimov led her up by the hand. Everyone made way for them. Ivan Ilyich rose solemnly and turned to her with a most courteous smile.

"Very glad to meet you, very," he said with an aristocratic inclination of his head. "Especially on such a day. . . ."

He smiled archly. The ladies were pleasantly agitated. "*Charmant!*" gasped the lady in the velvet gown.

The bride was a fit match for Pseldonimov. She was a thin little lady, not over seventeen years of age, pale, with a tiny face and a little sharp nose. Her small eyes, moving rapidly from side to side, showed not the least embarrassment, on the contrary, there was a keenness tinged with malice in their expression. Pseldonimov must have chosen her for her looks. She wore a white muslin dress over a pink slip. Her neck was stringy, her body birdlike, her bones prominent. She could not say a single word in answer to the General's greeting.

"Why, she's quite pretty!" he continued under his breath as if speaking to Pseldonimov alone, but loud enough for the bride to hear. But Pseldonimov answered not a word to this either, and this time did not even bow. Ivan Ilyich thought he could discern something cold and secretive in his eyes, something calculating, sinister. However, at all costs, his heart must be touched. That was what Ivan Ilyich had come for, after all.

"What a pair!" he thought. "And yet. . . ."

And he again turned to the bride, now seated on the sofa beside him, but to the two or three questions he put to her he received nothing but a yes or a no, and not even that quite clearly.

"If she only seemed shy," he said to himself, "then I could begin to joke. As it is, my position is an impossible one." Akim Petrovich, too, as if to spite him, kept silence, and though this was of course mere stupidity on his part, still it was inexcusable.

"Gentlemen, I hope I am not spoiling your pleasure!" he exclaimed to the room at large. He felt the palms of his hands were actually sweating.

"Oh, no! Don't worry about that, Your Excellency! We'll start again in a minute, we're only . . . cooling down," replied the officer. The bride regarded him with satisfaction. The officer was by no means old, and wore the uniform of some regiment. Pseldonimov still stood there, bending forward, and his hooked nose seemed to stand out still more prominently. He stood listening and looking, like a footman with an overcoat in his hands, waiting for the end of his master's farewell speeches. Ivan Ilyich himself made this comparison. He began to lose his head, to feel awkward, terribly awkward, as if the ground were slipping from under his feet, as if he had got into a place from which it was impossible to extricate himself, and had to grope in the dark.

Suddenly everyone made way for a stout, rather short woman, no longer young, dressed with no pretensions to gentility, but in her best, a great shawl pinned at her throat, and wearing a cap, to which she was obviously unaccustomed. She was carrying a small round tray on which stood a bottle of champagne, opened, but as yet untouched and exactly two glasses—neither more nor less. The bottle was evidently intended for only two guests.

The elderly woman went straight up to the General.

"Begging Your Excellency's pardon," she said, bowing. "But since you have deigned to do my son the honour of

coming to his wedding, kindly do not refuse to drink the health of the happy pair."

For Ivan Ilyich she came as a deliverer. She was by no means an old woman, not more than forty-five or forty-six years of age. But she had such a good-natured, rosy, frank, round Russian countenance, her smile was so good-humoured, she bowed with such simplicity, that Ivan Ilyich almost cheered up and began to hope.

"So you are the parent of your son?" he said, rising from the sofa.

"The parent, Your Excellency," mumbled Pseldonimov, craning his long neck and once more sticking out his nose.

"Ah! Very glad to make your acquaintance, very glad!"

"Do take something, Your Excellency!"

"With the greatest of pleasure!"

The tray was put down, Pseldonimov sprang to pour out the wine. Ivan Ilyich, still standing, took a glass.

"I am exceedingly glad, exceedingly glad, of this opportunity," he began, "to . . . to . . . express my . . . in a word, as your superior . . . I wish you, madame" (he turned to the bride) "and you, my friend Porfiry, I wish you all prosperity and a lifetime of happiness."

He swallowed the contents of the glass, the seventh he had drunk that evening, with unction. Pseldonimov looked before him gravely, not to say morosely. The General began to feel a hatred for him that was quite painful.

"And that lanky fellow," he thought, glancing at the officer, "hanging about . . . why on earth doesn't he shout hurrah or something? Everything would begin to go smoothly then."

"And won't you drink their healths, too, Akim Petrovich?" added the old woman, turning to the head clerk. "You are his chief, he is your subordinate. Look after my son, I beg you as a mother. And in future, dear Akim Petrovich, do not forget us, you are a good man."

"How delightful these old Russian women are!" thought Ivan Ilyich. "She's cheered everyone up. I've always loved the people—"

Just then another tray was brought up to the table. It was brought by a girl in a rustling, quite new print dress, draped over a crinoline. The tray was so huge, she could hardly get her arms round it. On it stood innumerable plates containing apples, bonbons, jujubes, fruit jellies, walnuts, and so on. Till this moment the tray had stood in the drawing-room for all the guests, principally for the ladies. But now it was put down before the General alone.

"I hope Your Excellency will not scorn our humble refreshments," said the old woman, bowing.

"Oh, come!" said Ivan Ilyich, selecting a walnut, not without pleasure, and cracking it between his fingers. He had made up his mind to be democratic to the last.

Suddenly the bride giggled.

"Well, Madame?" asked Ivan Ilyich with a smile, delighted at the sign of life.

"Oh, it's only Ivan Kostenkinich, sir, he says such funny things," she replied, lowering her eyes.

The General had already noticed a fair-haired youth, far from bad-looking, sheltering himself behind the back of the sofa, and whispering to Madame Pseldonimov. The youth rose to his feet. He was evidently very shy and very young.

"I was telling her about the dream-book, Your Excellency," he muttered half apologetically.

"What dream-book?" asked Ivan Ilyich indulgently.

"There's a new dream-book, a literary one. I told her that if one dreams of Mr. Panayev, it means one will spill coffee on one's shirt-front."

"How naive!" thought Ivan Ilyich irritably. The young man, though he had blushed violently while speaking,

was unutterably glad to have been able to drag in his Panayev.*

"Yes, yes, I've heard about it," responded His Excellency.

"Oh, but there's a better one," said a voice quite close to Ivan Ilyich. "A new dictionary is coming out and they say Mr. Krayevsky will contribute an article on Alferaki ... and ... on accusatory** literature."

This remark came from a young man who was not a bit shy, but on the contrary, inclined to be familiar. He wore gloves and a white waistcoat and held his hat in his hand. He did not dance, but looked on superciliously, for he was a contributor to the satirical magazine *The Brand*, and set the tone, having come to the wedding quite by chance, invited as an honoured guest by Pseldonimov, the young men having become intimate the year before, when they had starved together "in corners" let by a certain German woman. This youth had had no objections to the vodka, however, and kept retreating to a certain back room, the way to which everyone knew. The General took an instant dislike to him.

"And the joke is, Your Excellency," suddenly interrupted the fair-haired youth who had told the story about the spilling of coffee, and whom the journalist in the white waistcoat was regarding with detestation, "that the writer pretends Mr. Krayevsky can't spell and thinks *oblichitelni**** is spelt with an *a*."

But the fair-haired youth could hardly get to the end of his sentence. The look in the General's eyes showed that he had heard all this long ago, and that this very

* The reference is to "The Dream-Book of Modern Russian Literature," a parody on the editors of the progressive *Souremennik*, Nekrasov and Panayev, circulated in manuscript by the author, the poet Shcherbin (1821-68).—*Ed.*

** Untranslatable pun showing up the illiteracy of the compilers.—*Tr.*

*** *Oblichitelni*—accusatory. Thus an illiterate English compiler might list the words *engine* and *ingenious* under the letter *e*.—*Tr.*

fact was embarrassing to him. The young man was covered with confusion. He managed to keep in the background, and for the whole of the rest of the evening was extremely melancholy. The pert contributor to *The Brand* took his place, coming still nearer, and evidently intending to take a seat quite close to the General. Such familiarity struck Ivan Ilyich as a little too much.

"But tell me, now, Porfiry," he began, just for the sake of saying something, "I've been wanting to ask you for a long time, why are you called Pseldonimov and not Pseudonimov? Your name must surely be Pseudonimov."

"I cannot give you precise information as to that, Your Excellency," replied Pseldonimov.

"When his father first entered the service they probably muddled up the papers, and so now he remains Pseldonimov," explained Akim Petrovich. "It does happen."

"That's it!" said the General eagerly. "That's it, of course! For, judge for yourself—the name Pseudonimov comes from the literary word pseudonym. And Pseldonimov means nothing, you know."

"It arises from ignorance," added Akim Petrovich.

"What do you mean exactly by ignorance?"

"The Russian people. They sometimes change letters from ignorance. And sometimes they pronounce names in their own way. For instance, they say nivalid instead of invalid."

"I see, nivalid, he, he, he!"

"They say number, too, Your Excellency!" burst out the tall officer, who had long been itching to distinguish himself.

"What d'you mean number?"

"Number, instead of number, Your Excellency."

"Ah, number instead of number. Very good, he, he, he!" Ivan Ilyich was forced to giggle for the officer too.

The officer straightened his tie.

Ivan Ilyich looked at him severely.

"What are *you* butting in for," Pseldonimov whispered to the contributor.

"I'm only talking! Can't I talk?" whispered back the other, but he held his tongue and went out of the room in a secret fury.

He went straight to the attractive back room where two sorts of vodka, salt herring, pressed caviare, and a bottle of strong sherry from the national cellar had been placed for the benefit of the male section of the dancers at the very beginning of the party on a small table covered with an embroidered Yaroslavl table-cloth. He was pouring himself out some vodka with wrath in his heart, when suddenly the medical student with the untidy hair, the best dancer at Pseldonimov's ball, who knew the can-can, too, rushed in. He seized the decanter greedily.

"They're just going to begin!" he said, helping himself hastily. "Come and look! I'm doing a solo on my hands and after supper I'll risk doing the fish-dance."* It's really very appropriate for a wedding. A kind of friendly hint to Pseldonimov, so to say. Cleopatra Semyonovna's a darling, you can risk anything with her."

"He's a retrograde," replied the contributor morosely, finishing up his glass.

"Who's a retrograde?"

"Why, that person they put the sweetmeats in front of. A retrograde, I tell you!"

"Oh, you go on," muttered the student and rushed out of the room to the strains of the *ritournelle*.

Left to himself, the contributor poured out another glass for courage and independence, drank it up, and took a snack, and never had Ivan Ilyich, Councillor of State, acquired a more bitter enemy, or one more implacably bent on revenge—especially after a glass or two of vodka—than the contributor to *The Brand* he had taken such a

* The name given to an indecent dance.—*Tr.*

dislike to. Alas! Ivan Ilyich never suspected anything of the sort. And there was another most important circumstance which he never suspected, but which had its influence on all further relations between the guests and His Excellency. The fact of the matter was that though he had given what he considered a correct and even detailed explanation of his presence at his subordinate's wedding, this explanation had not really satisfied anyone, and the guests were still embarrassed. And then suddenly all was changed as if by magic. Everyone calmed down, ready to make merry, to laugh, to squeal, and to dance, just as if the unexpected guest were not in the room at all. The reason for this was the rumours, whispers, and tidings, which had in some inexplicable fashion got about to the effect that this guest was really a bit . . . well, tipsy. And although at first this was regarded as the most atrocious libel, it gradually gained credence so that all suddenly became perfectly clear, and everyone had an extraordinary sensation of freedom. At that very moment the quadrille began, the last before supper, in which the medical student had been so impatient to take part.

Ivan Ilyich had just made up his mind to speak to the bride again, intending this time to conquer her by some apt pun, when the tall officer flew up to her and went down on one knee. She immediately jumped off the sofa and fluttered away with him, to take her place in the ranks of the quadrille. The officer did not even apologize, and she did not so much as cast a glance at the General—she actually seemed relieved to have shaken him off.

"After all, she's well within her rights," thought Ivan Ilyich, "and one can't expect them to have manners."

"H'm. Don't stand on ceremony with me, Porfiry, old man," he said, turning to Pseldonimov. "Perhaps you have something to—see to—or—please don't mind me." ("What does he think he's doing—standing on sentry duty beside me?" he added to himself.)

Pseldonimov's long neck and the way his eyes were fixed so steadily on him had become intolerable to Ivan Ilyich. In a word, all this was not a bit as he had wished it to be, though Ivan Ilyich was far from admitting this.

The quadrille began.

"Allow me, Your Excellency?" asked Akim Petrovich, holding the bottle respectfully in his hands, ready to tilt it over His Excellency's glass.

"I-I-I really don't know whether—"

But Akim Petrovich was already pouring out champagne with an expression of beatific radiance. Having filled the glass he poured some out for himself, furtively, thievishly, writhing and shrugging, with however this difference, that he only filled his own glass up to the last half-inch, this seeming to him somehow more respectful. Seated beside his immediate superior, he felt like a woman in labour. And he could find nothing to talk about. It was manifestly his duty to entertain His Excellency, since he had the honour to bear him company. The champagne afforded a pretext, and besides His Excellency liked to have him pour out wine for him, not for the sake of the champagne itself, which was tepid and, of course, beastly, but simply for the moral satisfaction.

"The old chap wants to drink, himself," thought Ivan Ilyich, "and he doesn't like to unless I do. I won't be in his way. . . . Besides it would be absurd not to drink, with the bottle standing between us."

He took a sip, and even this seemed better than sitting there doing nothing.

"I am here," he began, spacing out and stressing his words, "I am here, so to say, by chance, and of course some may consider . . . that it . . . is . . . so to say, not quite proper for me to be present at such an . . . assembly."

Akim Petrovich said nothing, only listened with timid curiosity.

"But I hope you will understand why I am here—it wasn't really to drink that I came, you know. He-he!"

Akim Petrovich would have liked to giggle with His Excellency, but for some reason could not, and once more found nothing consoling to say.

"I am here—to, so to say, to encourage—to show, so to say, the moral, so to say, aims," continued Ivan Ilyich, vexed at Akim Petrovich's obtuseness, and suddenly falling silent himself, after noticing that the unfortunate Akim Petrovich was lowering his eyes as if he felt guilty. The General, in some confusion, hastened to take another sip from his glass, and Akim Petrovich, as if his salvation lay in this, seized the bottle and filled up the glass.

"You haven't very many resources," thought Ivan Ilyich, looking severely at the unfortunate Akim Petrovich. The latter, feeling the strict gaze of the General on his face, resolved not to say another word and not to raise his eyes. They sat on thus, vis-à-vis for two more minutes, two agonizing minutes for Akim Petrovich.

A word or two about Akim Petrovich. He was as meek as a lamb, a man of the old school, nourished in servility, and at the same time a worthy, not to say high-minded man. He was a Petersburg Russian, that is, his father and his father's father had been born and bred in Petersburg, had served there, and had never left the town. This is a very special class of Russians. They have not the slightest inkling of what is going on in Russia, and this ignorance causes them no concern. All their interests are confined to Petersburg, first and foremost, to the office they work in. All their worries concern *preference* for penny stakes, small shops, and their monthly wage. They know nothing of Russian customs and Russian songs, except *Luchinushka*, and that only because itinerant organ-grinders play it in the streets. There are, moreover, two

important and invariable features by which you can immediately distinguish a real Russian from a Petersburg Russian. The first consists in the fact that all Petersburg Russians without exception say "Academic Gazette" and never "Petersburg Gazette." The second, equally important, is that your Petersburg Russian never uses the word breakfast, but always says *Frühstuck*, with special emphasis on the *früh*. By these two essential distinguishing features you may always know them. In a word, this is a docile type which has finally crystallized during the past thirty-five years. Not that Akim Petrovich was by any means a fool. If the General had asked him about something within the sphere of his knowledge, he would have replied, and kept up the conversation, but it was improper for a subordinate to *ask* such questions, though Akim Petrovich was dying to know something more about His Excellency's present intentions.

Meanwhile Ivan Ilyich grew more and more thoughtful plunging into a sort of vortex of ideas. In his abstraction he kept taking sips from his glass the whole time, scarcely noticing that he did. And Akim Petrovich kept zealously filling up his glass. Neither spoke. Ivan Ilyich had begun to watch the dancing, which all of a sudden attracted his special attention. There was a certain detail which quite astonished him.

The dancing was becoming very abandoned. The dancers threw themselves into it in the most single-minded manner, determined to enjoy themselves to the point of frenzy. Few of the men were expert dancers, but the clumsy ones stamped so violently that they might have been taken for experts. The officer distinguished himself especially. He was particularly fond of figures in which he danced alone, as it were, a solo. At these times his writhings were really remarkable—he stood straight as a die, and then suddenly bent over sideways, as if he were just going to fall; but the next moment he as suddenly bent

over to the opposite side, forming an equally sharp angle to the floor. He preserved the utmost gravity of countenance, dancing in the full conviction that everyone was admiring him. Another cavalier fell asleep opposite his partner immediately after the first figure, having drunk his fill before the quadrille began, so that the lady was forced to dance alone. The young registrar, who had danced all the figures opposite the lady with the blue scarf throughout all five quadrilles that had been danced during the evening, repeated the same trick again and again. Standing a little back from his partner, he caught the ends of her scarf and, while changing partners, seized the opportunity to shower a score or so of kisses upon it. The lady herself floated before him, affecting not to have noticed anything. The medical student really did perform a solo on his hands, producing wild enthusiasm, stamping and squeals of pleasure. In a word, the utmost freedom prevailed. Ivan Ilyich, whom the wine had affected, was just going to smile, when a bitter doubt began gradually to invade his soul. Of course he wanted them to be themselves, to feel at their ease. He had craved, yes craved, for this atmosphere of familiarity and ease when they had all backed away from him, but now this familiarity was beginning to exceed all bounds. One lady, for example, in a worn blue velvet gown, bought at fourth-hand, pinned up her dress in the sixth figure, so that it looked as if she wore bloomers. It was that very Cleopatra Semyonovna with whom one could risk anything, according to her partner the medical student. Of the medical student it could only be said that he was a veritable Fokin.* But what did it all mean? First they back away, and then they suddenly become familiar. Nothing special of course, but the transition had been rather abrupt. He felt a foreboding. They seemed to have forgotten the very existence of Ivan

* Famous dancer of the can-can in Petersburg during the eighteenth sixties.—*Ed.*

Ilyich. Of course he was the first to laugh and even risked applauding. Akim Petrovich giggled respectfully in unison with him, with however obvious satisfaction, not for a moment suspecting that His Excellency was cherishing yet another serpent in his bosom.

"You dance very well, young man," Ivan Ilyich felt impelled to say to the student, who passed him by just as the quadrille was coming to an end.

The student turned sharply towards him, grimaced, and, bringing his face impertinently near His Excellency's, crowed like a cock at the top of his voice. This was too much. Ivan Ilyich rose from the table. Despite this, a volley of unrestrained laughter followed, for the crowing was so very natural, the trick had been so unexpected. Ivan Ilyich was still standing there in bewilderment, when Pseldonimov himself came bowing up to him inviting him to the supper table. After him came his mother.

"Good sir—Your Excellency—" she said bowing, "do us the honour, do not scorn our humble repast."

"I—I really don't know—" began Ivan Ilyich. "It wasn't for that I came—I—was just thinking of taking my leave—"

He really did have his cap in his hand, indeed, at that very moment he had vowed to himself that whatever happened he would go and that nothing should make him stay, and—and he stayed. A minute later he was heading the procession to the table. Pseldonimov and his mother went ahead and cleared a way for him. He was seated in the most honourable place and again an unsealed bottle of champagne appeared next to his plate. There were snacks on the table—herring and vodka. He stretched out his hand, poured himself out a big glass of vodka and drank it down. He was not used to drinking vodka. He felt as if he were rolling downhill, quicker, quicker, quicker, he knew he must stop, hold on to something, but did not know how to.

His situation was becoming more and more eccentric. Indeed, there was something ironic in it. In the space of a single hour God knows what had happened to him. When he had entered the house he had so to speak opened his arms to the whole of mankind and all his subordinates, and hardly an hour had passed when he had been forced to admit, with grief in his heart, that he detested Pseldonimov and cursed him, his wife, and his wedding. And this was not all—he could see by Pseldonimov's face, by his eyes alone, that he detested him no less, that his glances almost proclaimed: "To hell with you, damn you! Can't you get off my neck?" All this Ivan Ilyich had long read in Pseldonimov's glance.

Even now, Ivan Ilyich, as he approached the table, would rather have had his hand cut off than admit, even to himself, that this was how matters really stood. The moment had not yet come, there was still a certain moral balance. But his heart, his heart . . . it ached. It longed for freedom, air, rest. You see, Ivan Ilyich was really too kind-hearted.

He knew very well that he should have left long ago, and not only have left, but fled for his life. That things had turned out not a bit as he had dreamed they would out in the street.

"What did I come for? Was it to eat and drink?" he asked himself taking a bite of herring.

His thoughts took an almost cynical turn. A momentary irony at the expense of his own feat stirred within him. He even began to wonder in good earnest what after all he had come for.

"But how was I to go? To go without finishing it up, would have been absurd. What would they say? They would say I had been haunting improper places. That's how it will be if I don't finish it up. What, for example, would Stepan Nikiforovich, Semyon Ivanich, all those people at the office, those Shembels and Shubins say to-

morrow (for it will get about)? No, I must leave in such a manner that everyone should understand what I came for, I must make the moral purpose evident." But the inspiration never arrived. "They don't even respect me," he continued. "What are they laughing at? They're so familiar, they seem so callous. Yes, I have long suspected the younger generation of callousness. I must stay at all costs! They've finished with their dancing and now they've all gathered round the table I can mention questions, reforms, the greatness of Russia. . . . I'll win them over! I will! Perhaps nothing is lost, yet . . . perhaps, it's always like that in real life. How am I to make a beginning, to win them over? What method should I employ? I am bewildered, quite bewildered . . . and what do they want, what do they demand? I see they're laughing over there. Can it be at me, dear God? But what do *I* want? Why am I here? Why don't I go? What am I getting at?" With these thoughts, something like shame, profound, intolerable shame ate deeper and deeper into his heart.

But everything took its course, one thing after another.

Precisely two minutes after he had sat down to table, an appalling idea took possession of his whole being. He suddenly realized that he was terribly drunk, and not as he had been before, but hopelessly drunk. The cause of this was the glass of vodka following on the champagne, with immediate effect. He felt in his very being that he was falling into the last stages of weakness. He had a momentary access of Dutch courage, but his conscience gave him no peace, incessantly crying: "It's wrong, it's quite wrong, it's simply disgraceful!" Of course the wavering drunken thoughts could not remain for any time at one point: two sections suddenly formed within him, so vividly as to be almost palpable: in one were bravado, the desire to conquer, to overcome obstacles, and the des-

perate certainty that he would yet attain his purpose. The other section showed itself in agonizing mental torture and a feeling that something was sapping his heart's blood. "What will people say? How will it all end? Tomorrow, oh, what will tomorrow show?"

Up till then he had been dimly aware of the fact that he had enemies amongst the guests. "That's probably because I was drunk when I came," he told himself in anguished doubt. And now to his horror he discovered, from certain indubitable signs, that he really did have foes at the table, that there could no longer be the slightest doubt about it.

"And what have I done, after all?" he asked himself.

Around this table were seated altogether thirty guests, of whom several were already more than half-seas over. The others bore themselves with an air of careless, sinister independence, shouting, talking all together, proposing inappropriate toasts, and tossing pellets of bread to the ladies, who in their turn tossed them back. One man, an insignificant individual in a greasy frock-coat, fell off his chair the moment he sat down, and remained on the floor throughout supper. Another was determined to get on to the table and declare a toast, and his premature enthusiasm was only moderated by the officer's hanging on to his coat-tails. The supper was a perfect medley of dishes, despite the fact that a chef, the serf of some general, had been hired. There were meat jelly, tongue and potatoes, cutlets and green peas, and, finally, a goose, with a blanc mange to end up with. The drinks included beer, vodka, and sherry. A bottle of champagne stood beside the General's plate, from which he was forced to fill Akim Petrovich's glass, too, for the latter did not venture to extend his functions to the supper table. Cheap wine, or whatever they could lay their hands on, had been allotted to the rest of the guests for drinking toasts. The table itself was composed of a number of small tables placed

on end, including even a card table, all masked by odd table-cloths, one of which was a length of coloured Yaroslavl cloth. The ladies and gentlemen were seated alternately. Pseldonimov's mother would not sit down to table, and bustled about, giving orders. But there now appeared a sinister female who had not before shown herself, wearing a dress of reddish silk, with a kerchief bound over a swollen cheek, and an extremely high cap. She turned out to be the bride's mother, and had at last allowed herself to be persuaded to emerge from the back room for supper. Till now she had not appeared owing to her irreconcilable hostility to Pseldonimov's mother; but of this anon. She cast a disagreeable, not to say sarcastic look at the General, and evinced not the slightest desire to be introduced to him. Ivan Ilyich found this apparition extremely suspicious. But as well as her, there were several other suspicious characters who inspired him with instinctive misgivings and anxiety. It even looked as if they were hatching a plot amongst them—against Ivan Ilyich, of course. At any rate that is how it seemed to him, and as the supper went on he became more and more convinced of it. The most suspicious of all was a bearded gentleman, apparently an artist of sorts; he kept looking from Ivan Ilyich to his neighbour, and whispering in the latter's ear. Another guest, evidently a student, though, it is true, absolutely drunk, showed certain suspicious signs. There was something that boded no good about the medical student, too. Even the officer was not quite to be trusted. But the most conspicuous and particular hatred emanated from the contributor to *The Brand*. He sat sprawling in his chair so insolently, looked around him so arrogantly, snorted with such an independent air. The other guests did not pay much attention to the contributor, who had only had four verses printed in *The Brand* and become a liberal on the strength of them, indeed they obviously disliked him; but when a pellet of bread sud-

denly fell quite close to Ivan Ilyich he could have sworn that the culprit was none other than the contributor to *The Brand*.

All this, of course, affected him in the most deplorable manner.

And Ivan Ilyich made yet another extremely painful observation: the realization was forced upon him that he was beginning to pronounce his words indistinctly and with difficulty, that though there was a great deal he wanted to say, his tongue would not obey him. And a little later he fell to woolgathering, and, worst of all, snorting and laughing for no apparent reason, when there was nothing at all to laugh about. This phase passed soon after yet another glass of champagne which, though Ivan Ilyich had poured it out himself, he had not at first intended to drink, and then suddenly drank up as if by accident. After this, he felt almost like crying. He could see that he was falling into the most eccentric sentimentality. Once again he was moved by love, love for all, even Pseldonimov, even the contributor to *The Brand*. All of a sudden he wanted to embrace them all, to forget everything, to be friends with everyone. More—he wanted to open his heart to them, to tell them everything—what a nice kind man he was, and how talented, how useful he could be to his country, how he could amuse the female sex and, above all, how progressive he was, how well-intentioned towards everyone, down to the very lowest; and finally, to reveal frankly to them all the motives impelling him to appear uninvited at Pseldonimov's house, to drink a couple of bottles of champagne there, and gladden him by his presence.

"Truth, sacred truth—above all, frankness! I will reach their hearts through my frankness. They will believe me, I am sure they will. Now they cast hostile glances at me, but when I tell them everything, I shall conquer them irresistibly. They will fill their glasses and drink my health

with shouts of enthusiasm. The officer, I am certain of that, will break his glass against his spur. They may even shout 'hurrah!' Even if they should wish to toss me in the Hussar manner, I should offer no objections, it would be a very good thing, after all. I will kiss the bride on the forehead, she's a sweet little thing. Akim Petrovich is a very good man, too. Pseldonimov will, of course, improve in time. He lacks, so to say, the polish of high society. . . . And though the whole of the new generation lacks that spiritual delicacy, still I'll . . . I'll speak to them of the present mission of Russia among the other European powers. I will touch on the peasant question, too, yes, and . . . and they will all love me, and I shall make a glorious departure!"

These dreams were of course very pleasant, but the sudden discovery in himself, amidst all these rosy hopes, of an unexpected tendency to spit, was not so pleasant. Spittle suddenly began to spurt from his mouth quite against his will. He first became aware of this when he noticed that he had bespattered Akim Petrovich's cheek and that Akim Petrovich, out of deference, had refrained from wiping off the spittle immediately. Ivan Ilyich picked up his napkin and wiped it away himself. But the next minute this struck him as so ridiculous, so far beyond the bounds of common-sense, that he fell silent, absorbed in astonishment. Akim Petrovich had had quite a lot to drink, but he was not a bit excited. Ivan Ilyich now realized that for the last quarter of an hour he had been speaking to Akim Petrovich on the most interesting subject, and that Akim Petrovich, listening to him, seemed not only embarrassed, but actually afraid of something. Pseldonimov, who was sitting next but one to him, was also craning his neck towards him, his head on one side, listening with the most disagreeable expression on his face. He actually seemed to be watching him. Casting a glance over the guests, Ivan Ilyich observed that many of

them were looking straight at him and laughing. Strangest of all, this did not embarrass him in the least, quite the contrary. He took another sip from his glass and without any warning began addressing the whole company.

"I have just been saying, gentlemen!" he began, as loudly as he could, "I have just been saying to Akim Petrovich that Russia, yes . . . Russia . . . in a word, you understand what I am trying to say . . . it is my profound conviction that Russia is now going through . . . human-an-ity. . ."

"Human-an-ity!" came from the other end of the table.

"Hoo-hoo!"

"Goo-gool!"

Ivan Ilyich hung fire. Pseldonimov rose from his chair and looked up and down—who had shouted? Akim Petrovich shook his head furtively as if to bring the guests to a sense of shame. Ivan Ilyich did not fail to observe this, but maintained an agonized silence.

"Humanity!" he continued insistently, "and only a short time ago . . . yes, a very short time ago I said to Stepan Nikiforovich. . . Yes . . . that . . . that the renewal, so to say, of things—"

"Your Excellency!" came in a loud voice from the other end of the table.

"Your servant!" replied Ivan Ilyich, stopping short and trying to see who had called to him.

"Nothing at all, Your Excellency, I just got excited, proceed—proceed," said the same voice.

Ivan Ilyich winced.

"The renewal, so to say, of those very things—"

"Your Excellency!" shouted the voice again.

"Yes, sir!"

"Good day to you!"

This was too much for Ivan Ilyich. He broke off in the middle of a sentence and turned on the disturber of the peace. It was a very young student, extremely tipsy, ob-

viciously a most suspicious character. He had been yelling for some time, and had even broken a glass and two plates, declaring that it was the thing to do at a wedding. At the moment when Ivan Ilyich turned on him the officer was sternly admonishing the brawler.

"What are you yelling for? You ought to be turned out, that's all!"

"I didn't mean you, Your Excellency, I didn't mean you! Go ahead!" shouted the tipsy schoolboy, lolling back in his chair. "Proceed! I'm listening and I'm very, very pleased with you! Most praiseworthy! Most praiseworthy!"

"Drunken brat!" whispered Pseldonimov.

"I can see he's drunk, but—"

"I was telling him a very amusing story, Your Excellency," began the officer, "about an ensign from our platoon who spoke to the officer just like that. And now he's trying to imitate him. Whatever the officer said, he kept shouting 'Praiseworthy! Praiseworthy!' He was discharged from the service for it ten years ago."

"Who was that ensign?"

"He was in our platoon, Your Excellency, he went mad on the word 'praiseworthy.' First they tried kindly measures, and then they put him under arrest. The officer admonished him like a father, and he kept answering 'Praiseworthy, praiseworthy.' Very queer—he was a brave officer, over six foot tall. They meant to have him court-martialled, but then they saw he was crazy."

"He's only a schoolboy—one can treat skylarking indulgently ... for my part I am ready to forgive—"

"There was a medical examination, Your Excellency,"

"What! Did they ana-to-mize him?"

A loud and almost universal volley of laughter broke out among the guests, who had up till now borne themselves very correctly. Ivan Ilyich was furious.

"Gentlemen, gentlemen!" he shouted, at first hardly even stammering. "I am quite in a position to comprehend

that a living man is not dissected. I supposed that in his madness he was no longer alive . . . I mean, he died . . . I mean, I wanted to say . . . you don't love me . . . and yet I love you all . . . yes, I even love Por—Porfiry. I demean myself by saying this. . . .”

At this juncture abundant streams of saliva spurted from the lips of Ivan Ilyich, bespattering the table-cloth in the most conspicuous place. Pseldonimov rushed to wipe it up with his napkin. This last misfortune utterly crushed Ivan Ilyich.

“Gentlemen, this is too much!” he cried in despair.

“When a man's drunk, Your Excellency—” ventured Pseldonimov once again.

“Porfiry! I see you . . . all of you . . . yes, I say, I hope . . . yes, I call upon everyone to say . . . have I lowered myself in your eyes, or have I not?”

Ivan Ilyich was almost in tears.

“Oh, Your Excellency!”

“Porfiry, I ask you . . . tell me, if I came . . . yes . . . yes, to your wedding, had I no purpose? I wished to elevate morally . . . I wished you all to be moved. I ask you all—have I or have I not lowered myself considerably in your eyes?”

A deathlike silence ensued. Think of it—a deathlike silence, and in reply to such a critical question! “Now, why, why couldn't they cry out at such a moment?” flashed through His Excellency's head. But the guests only exchanged glances. Akim Petrovich seemed more dead than alive and Pseldonimov, dumb with terror, revolved in his mind over and over again the same awful question:

“What will become of me after all this, tomorrow?”

Suddenly the contributor to *The Brand*, by this time violently drunk, though up till now maintaining a morose silence, turned straight to Ivan Ilyich, his eyes gleaming, and took upon himself to answer for the whole company.

"Yes," he cried in a voice of thunder, "yes, you *have* lowered yourself, yes, you are a retrograde—re-tro-gradel!"

"You forget yourself, young man! Do you know whom you are addressing?" cried Ivan Ilyich furiously, once more jumping up in his place.

"You! And in the second place I am not a young man . . . you come here to show off and seek popularity—"

"Pseldonimov—what's the meaning of this?" cried Ivan Ilyich.

But Pseldonimov, after leaping to his feet, was too horrified to move, and knew not what to do. The guests all seemed to be frozen to their seats. The artist and the student cried: "Bravo! Bravo!"

The contributor continued shouting in irrepressible fury:

"Yes, you came to boast of your humanity! You interrupted the general gaiety. You drank champagne without thinking that it is too expensive for a clerk earning ten rubles a month, and I suspect that you are one of those superiors who have a taste for the young wives of their subordinates! More—I am convinced you are a supporter of tax paying. You are, you are, you are!"

"Pseldonimov! Pseldonimov!" cried Ivan Ilyich, stretching out his hands towards him. Every word of the contributor's was like a knife in his heart.

"Wait a minute, Your Excellency, please don't be distressed!" exclaimed Pseldonimov resolutely, and he ran up to the contributor, seized him by the coat collar, and dragged him away from the table. No one could have expected such physical strength from the puny Pseldonimov. But the contributor was extremely drunk, and Pseldonimov, who was quite sober, thumped him on the back once or twice and pushed him out of the room.

"Scoundrels—every one of you!" shouted the contributor. "I'll pillory you all tomorrow in *The Brand!*"

All leaped to their feet.

Pseldonimov, his mother, and a few of the guests crowded round the General with cries of: "Your Excellency! Your Excellency! Take no notice, Your Excellency!"

"No, no!" cried the General. "I am crushed—I came—I came here, so to say, to baptize . . . to bless. And this is what I get for it."

He sank into his chair as if unconscious, dropped his hands on the table, and leant his head on them, right in a plate of blanc mange. It would be vain to attempt to describe the universal horror. A minute later he rose, evidently desiring to go, swayed, caught his foot in the leg of the chair, fell flat on the floor, and began snoring. . . .

This is to be expected from men, not habitual drinkers, who happen to take too much. To the very last moment they preserve their consciousness and then suddenly drop like a felled tree. Ivan Ilyich lay on the floor, perfectly unconscious. Pseldonimov clutched at his hair and stood as if petrified. The guests began hurriedly dispersing, each explaining the occurrence in his own fashion. It was about three in the morning by now.

The truth is that Pseldonimov's circumstances were a great deal worse than might have been supposed, even allowing for the unpleasantness of his present situation. And now while Ivan Ilyich is still lying on the floor, with Pseldonimov standing over him, clutching his hair in desperation, we may as well interrupt the course of our narrative and say a few explanatory words as to Porfiry Petrovich Pseldonimov himself.

Only a month before his marriage he had been quite at the end of his tether. He came from a gubernia where his father had occupied some post or other, and died while on trial for some peccadillo. When, five months before his marriage, Pseldonimov, who had been dragging out a famished existence in Petersburg for a whole year,

obtained a job at ten rubles a month, he felt himself to be revived body and soul, but very quickly was brought low again by circumstances. There were only two Pseldonomovs left in the whole world, he and his mother, who had left the gubernia at the death of her husband. Mother and son starved together in the bitter cold, and fed on the most dubious substances. There were days when Pseldonomov himself went to the Fontanka with a mug, there to quench his thirst. When he at last found employment he and his mother managed to find a corner for themselves. She went out as a washerwoman, and he saved up for four months to get himself a pair of boots and an overcoat. And the suffering he endured at his office! His superior would come to him with the question—when was the last time he had been at the bathhouse? The rumour ran that bugs had made nests under his coat collar. But Pseldonomov had plenty of will-power: he looked very meek and quiet; his education had been of the scantiest, and he was hardly ever heard to express an opinion. I do not know for certain whether he thought, drew up plans and systems, cherished aspirations of any sort. At any rate a kind of instinctive, indomitable unconscious resolve to extricate himself from his unenviable position and set his feet on the highway, had formed within him. He had an antlike tenacity—you may destroy the ants' nest and they will immediately build it up again, destroy it again, and they will start building again, and so on *ad infinitum*. His was a persevering, thrifty soul. You could see at a glance that he would make his way, feather his nest, and perhaps even save something up. No one in the whole world loved him but his mother, and she loved him unreservedly. She was determined, persevering, industrious, as well as extremely good-natured. They might have gone on living in their corner for another five or six years waiting for something to happen, if they had not encountered retired Titular Councillor Mlekopitayev, an 'ex-treasury

clerk who had once served in the provinces, and had lately settled down with his family in Petersburg. He knew Pseldonimov, whose father had once done him a good turn. He had a little money, not much, to be sure, but some. Nobody knew how much it really was, neither his wife, his eldest daughter, nor his relatives. He had two daughters, and, being a singularly crotchety old fellow, a drunkard and a domestic tyrant, and a sick man into the bargain, he took it into his head to marry one of his daughters to Pseldonimov. "I know him, you see, his father was a good man, and the son will be a good man, too." When Mlekopitayev wanted to do a thing, he did it. He was a very eccentric tyrant. He spent most of his time seated in an armchair deprived by his disease of the use of his legs, which, however, did not prevent him from drinking. He drank and swore for days on end. He was a ferocious man, and liked to have someone near him whom he could torture incessantly. For this purpose he kept a few distant relatives in his home—his sister, an ailing, grumbling woman, two sisters of his wife, also bad-tempered scolds, an old aunt, one of whose ribs had been broken in an accident. As well as these he kept another hanger-on, a lady of German extraction, for her gift for telling him stories from *The Arabian Nights*. His main pleasure consisted in tormenting all these unfortunate dependents, in cursing them incessantly for all he was worth, although none of them, not even excepting his wife, who seemed to have been born with the toothache, dared to utter a word in his presence. He set them at loggerheads among themselves, invented and spread gossip and slander, and laughed and rejoiced to see them all up in arms against one another. He was exceedingly glad when his elder daughter, who had dragged out ten hungry years with her officer husband, came to him as a widow with three small, ailing children. He detested the children, but since they provided him with additional ma-

terial for his daily experiments, the old fellow was quite content. This group of bad-tempered women and sick children huddled together, with their tormentor, in the wooden house on the Petersburg side. Half-famished, since the old man was stingy and doled out money a few kopeks at a time, though he never grudged expenditure on vodka, they never had their sleep out, for the old man suffered from insomnia and demanded to be entertained. In a word, they all dragged out a wretched existence and cursed their fate. Just about this time Mlekopitayev happened to notice Pseldonimov. He was struck by his long nose and meek appearance. His sickly, plain younger daughter had just passed her seventeenth birthday. Though she had at one time attended a German *Schule*, she had gleaned little more from it than the elements of learning. Thereafter she grew up puny and scraggy, beneath the crutch of her drunken parent with his useless legs, in the hell of family tale-bearing, spying, and slander. She had neither friends, nor brains. She had been wanting to get married for a long time. Before strangers she was meek, but at home, at her mother's side, amongst the crowd of hangers-on, she was cross-grained and sharp as a gimlet. She loved to pinch her sister's children, knocking them about and telling on them if they stole sugar or bread, so that between her and her elder sister there existed an endless unquenchable quarrel. The old man himself offered her to Pseldonimov. Poor as the latter was, still he asked for a short time for consideration. He and his mother pondered the question long. But the house was registered in the daughter's name. It was only a wooden, one-storeyed, ramshackle affair to be sure, but a house is a house. Besides this, she would have four hundred rubles, a sum that it would take a long time to save up. "What do you think I am taking a man into the house for?" shouted the drunken tyrant. "In the first place, because it's full of women, and I'm sick of women. I

mean Pseldonimov to dance to my piping, for I shall be his benefactor. In the second place, I am taking him because you are all against it, because it upsets you. I'm doing it to spite you. What I have said, I do! And you, Porfiry, beat her, when she's your wife. She has always had seven devils in her, from her very birth. Drive them all out, you can have my crutch!"

Pseldonimov said nothing, but he had made up his mind. He and his mother were taken into the house before the ceremony, washed, clothed, shod, and given money for the wedding. The old man probably really did patronize them because his whole family hated them. He actually took a liking to Pseldonimov's mother, putting a constraint on himself, and not tormenting her. Pseldonimov he forced to dance the *kazachok* to him a week before the wedding. "That'll do, I only wanted to see if you knew your place," he said at the end of the dance. He allowed the scantiest possible sum of money for the wedding, to which he invited all his relatives and acquaintances. The only guests from Pseldonimov's side were the contributor to *The Brand* and Akim Petrovich, the guest of honour. Pseldonimov knew very well that his bride hated the sight of him and that she would have liked to marry the officer instead. But he bore it all, this was the resolution he and his mother had taken. All through the day of the wedding, and the whole evening the old man swore foully and drank. The household, owing to the wedding, huddled into the back rooms, crowding there till they were almost suffocated. The front rooms were set aside for the ball and the supper. At last, at about eleven o'clock, when the old man, dead drunk, had gone to sleep, the bride's mother, who had been exceptionally disagreeable to Pseldonimov's mother all day, decided to let bygones be bygones and go to the ball and the supper. The appearance of Ivan Ilyich spoilt everything. Mlekopitayev's wife was embarrassed, took offence, scold-

ed everyone for not having warned her that a real live General had been invited. She was assured that he had come uninvited, but she was not going to believe that. Champagne had to be sent for. Pseldonimov's mother had only a single ruble, and he himself had not a kopek. It had been necessary to propitiate the disagreeable old woman and ask her for money first for one and then for another bottle of champagne. She was implored to think of her son-in-law's relations with his superiors, his career—appeals were made to her conscience. At last she gave them some money, but made Pseldonimov drink so deep of humiliation that, more than once, rushing into the tiny room in which the bridal bed had been prepared, and, silently clutching at his hair, he threw himself face down on the bed appointed for divine raptures, trembling with impotent rage. Ah! Ivan Ilyich had no idea what the two bottles of champagne drunk by him that evening had cost! What was Pseldonimov's horror, grief and even despair, when the whole thing ended as it did. Once more there was trouble ahead, and perhaps for the whole night, the squeals and tears of the captious bride, the reproaches of her idiotic relatives. Even now his head ached, and he felt a film of reeking gloom stealing over his eyeballs. And now here was Ivan Ilyich requiring aid, a doctor must be sought at three in the morning, or a carriage to take him home, and it must be a private carriage, such an important personage could not be sent home in his present condition, by an ordinary droshky. And where was the money for the carriage to come from? The bride's mother, furious because the General had not said a word to her and had not so much as looked her way during supper, declared that she hadn't another kopek. Perhaps she really hadn't. Where was the money to come from? What was to be done? Oh, there was good reason to tear one's hair!

In the meanwhile Ivan Ilyich was carried to the little leather couch in the dining-room. While the tables were being cleared and taken apart, Pseldonimov rushed about trying to borrow some money, even asking the servants, none of whom, however, had any. He actually risked troubling Akim Petrovich, who had stayed behind the rest. But he, though a good-hearted man, was thrown into such perplexity, not to say terror, at the mention of money, that he could only utter the most incoherent nonsense.

"Another time I'd do it with pleasure—" he muttered, "but now—I'm afraid I. . . . You must really excuse me."

And picking up his cap he hastened out of the house. The only person who turned out to be of any use was the kind-hearted youth who had talked about the dream-book, and even he was not much good. He had stayed behind the rest, out of heartfelt sympathy for the sorrows of Pseldonimov. At last Pseldonimov, his mother, and the youth conferred together and decided, rather than send for a doctor, to fetch a carriage and take the patient home, and for the moment, till the carriage should come, to try certain home remedies on him, such as bathing his temples and head with cold water, putting ice on his head, and so on. Pseldonimov's mother undertook to do all this. The youth sped off to look for a carriage. Since there were not even any droshky to be found on the Petersburg side at this hour, he went to a haunt of cabmen on the outskirts of the town, and roused them. They bargained, asserting that even five rubles would be little enough for a carriage at this time of night. At last, however, one of them agreed to take three rubles. But when just before four o'clock the youth arrived at the Pseldonimovs' in a hired carriage, the plans had long ago been changed. It appeared that Ivan Ilyich, who was still unconscious, was so ill, tossed and moaned so piteously, that it would have been quite impossible, if not dangerous, to move him. "And who knows what might come, of it?" Pseldonimov, utterly discouraged

asked himself. What was to be done? Another problem arose: if the patient was to be left in their house, where was he to be put? In the whole house there were only two beds—a huge marital couch on which Mlekopitayev slept with his spouse, and a newly purchased double bed of imitation walnut, intended for the newly-weds. Most of the other inhabitants slept on the floor, side by side, on feather mattresses, which were in a deplorable state, being stinking and altogether indecent objects, while there were only just enough of them to go round, if that. Where was the patient to be put? A feather mattress could no doubt have been found—for that matter one could have been dragged from beneath some sleeper, but where was it to be laid and on what? The best place was found to be the living-room, since it was farthest from the haunts of the family, and had a separate entrance. But where was a mattress to be put? Surely not on chairs? Everyone knows that only schoolboys have beds made up for them on chairs, when they come home for Saturday and Sunday, and this would have been very disrespectful to a person like Ivan Ilyich. What would he say tomorrow, when he waked up and found himself sleeping on chairs? Pseldonimov would not hear of it. There was only one thing left—to put him in the bridal bed. This bridal bed, as we have already stated, stood in a tiny room opening out of the dining-room. On it was a newly purchased, double mattress, on which nobody had ever slept, clean sheets, and four pink calico pillows in ruched muslin cases. The eiderdown was of pink satin, elaborately stitched. Muslin curtains were threaded through a gilt ring overhead. In a word, everything was precisely as it should be, and the guests, almost all of whom had found their way to the bedroom, had been loud in their praises. Much as the bride detested Pseldonimov, she had several times in the course of the evening tiptoed furtively in to steal another look at it. What then was her indignation, her fury, when she learned

that it was intended to transfer a sick man, in a fit of something almost like cholera, to her bridal bed! The bride's mother tried to stand up for her, swearing loudly and threatening to complain to her husband the very next day. But Pseldonimov showed his strength of will and insisted on having his own way. Ivan Ilyich was put in the bridal chamber, and a mattress was laid upon chairs for the married couple. The bride whimpered, was ready to pinch everyone, but dared not disobey. Papa had a crutch with which she was very familiar and she knew he would be sure to demand a detailed report regarding certain matters the next day. To console her the pink eiderdown and the muslin-covered pillows were brought into the living-room. It was at this moment that the youth arrived in the carriage. Learning that it was no longer needed he was seized with terror. He would have to pay for it himself and he never had so much as a ten-kopek piece on him. Pseldonimov declared his utter bankruptcy. Attempts were made to pacify the driver, who, however, began shouting and banging on the shutters. How it all ended I cannot exactly say. Apparently the youth took himself in the carriage as a hostage to Peskee 4th Christmas Street, where he hoped to arouse a student spending the night with some friends, and see if he had any money. It was past four in the morning by the time the newly-weds were left alone, locked up in the room. Pseldonimov's mother watched by the bedside of the sufferer all night. She lay on a rug on the floor, covering herself with her thin coat, but could not sleep, as she had to get up constantly—Ivan Ilyich had a terrible attack of diarrhea. Courageous and magnanimous old soul that she was, she undressed him with her own hands, tending him as if he were her own son, carrying the necessary utensil backwards to and from the bedroom along the passage all night. But the misfortunes of this night were not over by a long way yet.

Hardly ten minutes had passed since the young couple had been locked up in the room, when the most heart-rending shriek was heard, a shriek not of joy, but of the most ominous nature. This was followed by a thud, a crash, and a noise as of chairs falling, and in a moment the dark room was invaded by a crowd of gasping, terrified women in all aspects of deshabille. These women were: the bride's mother, her elder sister, leaving her sick children for the moment, and her three aunts, including the one with a broken rib. Even the cook was there, even the German hanger-on, the one who told fairy-tales, whose very own mattress, the best in the house and constituting her entire property, had been dragged from under her by force, and given to the newly-weds, came to see what was the matter. All these worthy and perspicacious women had been stealing out of the kitchen and tiptoeing along the passage and listening in the hall for the past quarter of an hour, devoured by irresistible curiosity.

In the meanwhile somebody hastily lit a candle and a most unexpected sight was revealed to all. The chairs, unable to bear the double weight, and only supporting the mattress at the edges, had shifted, and the mattress had fallen between them on to the floor. The bride was whimpering with rage. This time she was cut to the quick. The stricken Pseldonimov stood there like a criminal caught red-handed. He did not even attempt to excuse himself. Moans and squeals came from all sides. Pseldonimov's mother, hearing the noise, came running up too, but this time the bride's mamma scored a total victory. She began by showering Pseldonimov with strange and for the most part unjust reproaches such as, call yourself a husband after that? what's the good of you after such a disgrace? and so on, till at last, taking her daughter by the hand, she led her away from her husband, taking upon herself the responsibility of answering the irate father, when he demanded a report next morning. They all poured out

after her, exclaiming and nodding their heads. No one was left with Pseldonimov but his mother, and she attempted to console him. But he drove her away instantly.

He was not to be consoled. Staggering over to the couch he sat down deep in sombre meditations, barefooted, and wearing only the most necessary garment. The thoughts chased one another in confusion through his brain. Sometimes he cast a mechanical glance around the room where so recently the dancers had made such wild merriment, and the air was still laden with cigarette smoke. The filthy floor, wet in spots, was still littered with *bonbon* papers and cigarette-stubs. The ruin of the bridal bed and the overturned chairs bore witness to the vanity of the best and truest earthly hopes and dreams. He sat on like this for almost a whole hour. Nothing but the darkest thoughts such as: "What was he now to expect at the office?" came into his head. He realized in anguish that he would have to look for another job at all costs, for it would be impossible to stay on at the old one after what had happened tonight. The thought of Mlekopitayev came into his head—Mlekopitayev, who would no doubt force him tomorrow to dance the *kazachok* again, to test his docility. He thought, too, that though Mlekopitayev had given him fifty rubles for the wedding, all of which to the last kopek had been spent, not a word had been said as to handing over the promised four hundred rubles dowry, and even the house had not yet been formally registered. Then he went on to think of his wife, who had abandoned him in the most critical moment of his life, and of the tall officer kneeling on one knee in front of her. He had seen that all right. He thought of the seven devils dwelling in her, on the evidence of her own father, and of the crutch prepared to drive them out. He felt capable of enduring much, it is true, but fate had prepared for him at the last ordeals that almost forced him to doubt his own strength.

Thus grieved Pseldonimov. In the meantime the candle-end burned quite low. Its flickering light, falling straight on Pseldonimov's profile, cast an enormous shadow on the wall—a craning neck, a hooked nose, and two tufts of hair, one sticking out over his forehead, the other on the back of his head. At last, when the morning freshness began to steal into the room, he got up, shivering and stunned, tottered over to the mattress between the chairs, and, without setting anything to rights, putting out the candle, or so much as placing a pillow beneath his head, let himself down on the tumbled bedclothes and slept the leaden, deathlike slumber probably known to men condemned to public execution on the morrow.

But what could compare with the night of torture spent by Ivan Ilyich Pralinsky on the bridal bed of the unhappy Pseldonimov! For some time headache, nausea, and other unpleasant sensations never left him for a moment. He went through the torments of hell. His consciousness, though it scarcely flickered in his brain, lit up such depths of horror, such gloomy and loathsome scenes, that it would have been better if he had remained quite unconscious. Of course, all was as yet confusion within. He did recognize Pseldonimov's mother, he heard her kindly admonitions: "Bear it, dearie, bear it, you'll get used to it!" and yet though he recognized her he could not give himself any logical reason for her presence beside him. Foul spectres appeared before him—the most frequent was Semyon Ivanich, but gazing more intently he observed that it was not Semyon Ivanich at all, but Pseldonimov's nose. The artist, the officer, the old woman with the swollen cheek, all flashed swiftly by. What occupied his thoughts most of all was the gilt ring hanging over his head, through which the curtains had been threaded. He could make it out clearly by the dim light of the candle-end,

and kept asking himself: "What's that ring for, why is it here, what does it mean?" He asked the old woman about it several times, but he must have said something quite different from what he wanted to say, and she could not understand him, try as he might to explain. At last, just before daybreak, the attacks ceased and he slept, slept soundly and dreamlessly for about an hour. When he waked up it was almost in full consciousness, with an intolerable headache, and the most revolting taste in his mouth, while his tongue felt like a bit of flannel. He sat up in bed, looked round, and tried to think. The pale light of dawn was struggling through the chinks in the shutters, and lay in an ever widening strip on the wall. It was about seven o'clock in the morning. But when Ivan Ilyich realized where he was and remembered all that had happened that night, when he remembered the incidents at the supper table, his frustrated attempt at a heroic feat, his speech; when the consequences of all this, what would be said and thought, presented itself with appalling vividness to his mind in a single flash, when he looked around and saw the wretched and hideous mess he had made of the peaceful bridal bed of his subordinate—oh, then such shame, such agony suddenly visited his heart that he cried out, covered his face with his hands, and threw himself back on the pillow in despair. A minute later he leaped out of bed, caught sight of his clothes on a chair, neatly folded and cleaned, seized them and began putting them on, casting rapid furtive glances over his shoulder as if terrified of something or other. On another chair lay his coat and cap, his tan gloves placed in the cap. He tried to steal away unnoticed, but suddenly the door opened and old Pseldonimova came in, bearing an earthenware bowl and a china basin. Over her shoulder hung a towel. She put down the basin and declared firmly that he had simply got to have a wash.

"You must wash, sir, you can't go away unwashed."

At that moment Ivan Ilyich realized that if there was a single creature in the world before whom he could feel at ease, and fear nothing, it was precisely this old woman. He washed. Long after, in moments of depression, he would remember, among other causes for remorse, everything about this awakening, the earthenware bowl, the china basin full of cold water, in which there still floated icicles, and the oval cake of soap in its pink wrapping, with the letters indented on its surface, worth about fifteen kopeks and no doubt purchased for the young couple, but which Ivan Ilyich was fated to be the first to use . . . and the old woman with the linen towel over her left shoulder. . . . The cold water refreshed him, he dried himself, and, without saying a word, without so much as thanking his nurse, seized his cap, shouldered on his coat, held out to him by Pseldonimov's mother, and made his way through the passage, through the kitchen where the cat was mewing and the cook, raising herself on her mattress, looked after him with eager curiosity, rushed out into the yard, to the street, and clambered into a passing droshky. It was a frosty morning and a cold yellowish fog covered all the houses and other objects. Ivan Ilyich raised his coat collar. He felt as if everyone were looking at him, everyone knew who he was, recognized him. . . .

For eight days he did not leave his house or appear at his office. He was ill, dreadfully ill, morally rather than physically. During those eight days he went through a veritable inferno, and let us hope they were set to his credit in the next world. There had been moments when he had actually thought of going into a monastery. There really had been! His imagination had taken to wandering in that direction. He heard low, subterranean singing, saw an open grave, visualized life in a solitary cell, a forest or a cave. But returning to his senses, he immediately

admitted to himself that all this was pure nonsense and exaggeration, and was ashamed of it. Then began moral torments around the thought of his *existence manquée*. Then shame again rose within his heart, filling it completely, scorching it, rubbing salt into his wounds. He trembled at the pictures that passed before him. What would they say of him, what would they think, when he went back to the office, what whisperings would haunt him for a whole year, ten years, his whole life? The story would be handed down to posterity. In a fit of panic he was once ready to go that very moment to Semyon Ivanich and beg his pardon, his friendship. He did not even seek to justify himself, he castigated himself incessantly. He could find no excuses for his conduct, he would have been ashamed to look for them.

He even thought of instantly handing in his resignation and devoting himself to the happiness of mankind, just as he was, unaided. In any case he would have to change all his acquaintances and that, in such a way as to erase all memories of himself. Then the idea came to him that this was nonsense, too, and that everything could be put right by treating his subordinates with still greater severity than before. At such moments he would feel hopeful and begin to cheer up. After eight whole days of doubt and torture, he felt he could no longer bear the suspense, and *un beau matin* decided to go to the office.

While he was still at home, in dejection, he had tried a thousand times to imagine how he would enter the office. He had a terrified conviction that he was bound to hear an ambiguous whispering as he passed, to see ambiguous countenances, to glean malevolent smiles. What was his astonishment when none of all this happened. He was met respectfully, bowed to. All were grave, all busy. His heart filled with joy and he made his way to his private office.

Once there, he immediately plunged into serious business, listened to a few reports and elucidations, gave instructions. He felt he had never reasoned or argued so wisely, in such a business-like manner, as on that morning. He saw that he gave satisfaction, that he was appreciated, that he was treated with respect. The most sensitive vanity could not have noticed anything wrong. All went splendidly.

At last Akim Petrovich himself appeared with some papers. At the sight of him Ivan Ilyich felt a stab at his heart, but this was only for a moment. He worked with Akim Petrovich, held forth pompously, showed him what to do, and explained everything to him. He noticed however that he seemed to avoid letting his eyes rest long on Akim Petrovich or, rather, that Akim Petrovich was afraid to look at him. But now Akim Petrovich had finished and was beginning to gather up the papers.

"There is one more request," he began, trying to speak as indifferently as possible. "Registrar Pseldonimov asks to be transferred to the department. . . . His Excellency Semyon Ivanich Shipulenko has promised him a place. He requests your favourable assistance, Your Excellency."

"Ah, so he wants to be transferred," said Ivan Ilyich, feeling an enormous load lifted from his shoulders. He glanced at Akim Petrovich and for a moment their eyes met.

"Very well . . . for my part . . . I will endeavour. . ." replied Ivan Ilyich. "I am quite willing."

Akim Petrovich seemed anxious to get away as quickly as possible. But Ivan Ilyich, in a fit of generosity, decided to express himself finally. Once more he was visited by an inspiration.

"Tell him," he began, fixing a clear glance of profound significance on Akim Petrovich. "Tell him I bear him no grudge. Yes, I bear him no grudge. That, on the contrary, I am quite ready to forget the past, to forget all, all—"

But Ivan Ilyich suddenly checked himself, observing with astonishment the strange behaviour of Akim Petrovich who, from having been a rational man, suddenly appeared for some unknown reason to have become the most appalling fool. Instead of listening respectfully, he blushed like an imbecile, began with almost indecent haste to perform a series of little bows while backing towards the door. He looked as if he would like to fall through the earth, or perhaps merely to get back to his seat as soon as possible. Left alone, Ivan Ilyich rose in some perturbation from his chair. He looked in the glass without seeing his reflection.

"No—severity, and again severity," he whispered almost unconsciously, and suddenly his whole face was suffused with a rich blush. At that moment he felt more deeply ashamed, more wretched, than he had felt in the very worst moments of his eight-day illness. "Couldn't keep it up!" he said to himself, and sank helplessly on to his chair.



THE GAMBLER
FROM A YOUNG MAN'S
DIARY

Back again after a fortnight's absence. They had all been in Roulettenburg three days. I thought they would all be dying to see me, but I was greatly mistaken. The General looked at me with a nonchalant air, addressed me condescendingly, and sent me to his sister. Obviously they had got hold of some money somewhere or other. I could not help feeling that the General was not quite at his ease with me. Marya Filippovna seemed extremely preoccupied, and could hardly find time to speak to me. She took the money, however, counted it, and listened to what I had to say. Mezentsov, as well as the Frenchie, and an Englishman I had never met were expected to dinner; the moment there was money, of course, they had to give a dinner-party, in the true Moscow tradition. When Paulina Alexandrovna caught sight of me, she asked: "Where have you been all this time?" and turned away without waiting for an answer. I realize this was quite deliberate on her part, of course. She and I will have to have a talk. There are many things we need to have out.

A tiny room on the fourth floor of the hotel had been allotted to me. I am known here as a member of the General's household. It's easy to see that they have already managed to make themselves conspicuous. The General passes for a wealthy Russian aristocrat. Before dinner he found time to send me, among other errands, to the hotel bureau to change a couple of thousand-franc bills. We shall now be regarded as millionaires—for a week at least. I thought of taking Misha and Nadya for a walk,

but the General sent for me just as I was going downstairs—all of a sudden he had to know where I meant to take them. The man positively cannot meet my eyes. He would very much like to, but I always respond with a steady, that is to say, an insolent stare—and this seems to disconcert him. In extremely stilted language, piling clause on clause, and finally getting thoroughly mixed up, he gave me to understand that I must take the children to walk in the park, as far as possible from the Kur-saal. In the end he quite lost his temper, and added rudely: "For all I know, you meant to take them to the Kur-saal! . . . You must forgive me," he added, "but I know you are still rather reckless, and probably quite capable of gambling. However that may be, though I am not your mentor, and have not the slightest desire to undertake such a role, I *am* entitled to demand that you should not, as it were, compromise me. . . ."

"I have no money," I replied calmly. "To lose, one must first have money."

"You will receive some immediately," replied the General, flushing slightly; and rummaging in his desk he looked through his account book and discovered that he owed me something like a hundred and twenty rubles.

"How are we to settle it?" he said. "It will have to be changed into thalers. Take a hundred thalers for the moment, by way of a round sum, the rest will not run away."

I took the money in silence.

"You mustn't be offended by anything I say, you're so touchy you know—I only want to warn you, and it seems to me I have a certain right to do so—"

On my way back with the children before dinner, I met a regular cavalcade. They had been to inspect some ruins or other. Two grand carriages, drawn by splendid horses, Mademoiselle Blanche in one, with Marya Filip-povna and Paulina; the Frenchie, the Englishman, and our General on horseback. . . . People stopped to look at

them, the effect was certainly impressive; but I'm afraid all this will end badly for the General. I calculated that, with the four thousand francs I had brought, plus what they had apparently managed to lay their hands on, they must now have seven or eight thousand francs—not enough for Mademoiselle Blanche. Mademoiselle Blanche is stopping in our hotel with her mother; our Frenchie is somewhere or other about the place, too. The hotel servants call him Monsieur le Comte, and Mademoiselle Blanche's mother is called Madame la Comtesse; who knows, perhaps they really are a count and countess.

I was right in supposing that Monsieur le Comte would not recognize me when we all gathered together before dinner. And the General, of course, would not think of introducing us, or even of mentioning my name to him. Monsieur le Comte has been to Russia, so he is well aware that what they call an *outchitel* (teacher) is very small fry. He knows me perfectly well of course. I am bound to admit, however, that I appeared at dinner uninvited. The General, apparently, forgot to give orders, or he would have sent me to dine at the *table d'hôte*. I turned up on my own initiative and the General glanced at me in displeasure. Good-natured Marya Filippovna immediately found a place for me; but it was the meeting with Mr. Astley which saved me and I found myself an involuntary member of their circle.

The first time I met that queer Englishman was in a Prussian railway carriage where we had sat opposite one another, I being on my way to catch up the rest of the party. I next encountered him at the French frontier, and yet again in Switzerland. I had come across him twice again in the past fortnight, and now I was meeting him here in Roulettenburg. Never in my life have I known such a shy man! He is shy to the point of imbecility, and of course realizes this thoroughly himself, for he is by no means stupid. For the rest he is very nice and quiet. I

managed to draw him out at our first meeting in Prussia. He told me he had been at the Cap du Nord this summer, and that he was very anxious to visit the Novgorod fair. I have no idea how he got to know the General; he seems to be head over ears in love with Paulina. When she came into the room he blushed like a sunset sky. He was very glad to find that I was his neighbour and seems already to regard me as a sworn friend.

The Frenchie put on the most extraordinary airs at table. He treats everyone negligently and condescendingly. But I can remember how eager to please he used to be in Moscow. He talked a great deal about finance and Russian politics. The General occasionally ventured to contradict him, but very tactfully, just to show that he had not finally renounced his own claims to importance.

I was in an odd humour. It goes without saying that dinner was not half over before I had put myself the usual, inevitable question: what on earth am I doing hanging round this General, and why have I not left them long ago? I glanced at Paulina Alexandrovna every now and then. She took not the slightest notice of me. I ended by becoming thoroughly exasperated and watching for an opportunity to be rude.

It began by my butting loudly and abruptly into the conversation. I wanted to pick a quarrel with the Frenchie at all costs. I turned to the General and interrupted him by remarking loudly and distinctly that it had become quite impossible this summer for a Russian to dine at a *table d'hôte*. The General gazed at me in astonishment.

"If you are a person with any self-respect," I continued, "you are certain to meet with abuse and endure the most atrocious slights. In Paris, on the Rhine, even in Switzerland, there are so many Poles and their French sympathizers at the *table d'hôtes*, that you cannot get a word in if you happen to be a Russian."

I said this in French. The General stared at me in perplexity, not knowing whether to be angry, or simply to show his astonishment at my impertinence.

"No doubt somebody gave you a lesson somewhere," drawled the Frenchie with lazy scorn.

"First I had a row with a Pole in Paris," I replied, "and then with a French officer who stood up for the Pole. Some of the French came over to my side when I told them I intended to spit into *Monsignor's* coffee."

"Spit!" echoed the General in pompous amazement, darting a glance over his shoulder. The Frenchie looked at me incredulously.

"Yes, sir," I replied. "And since for two days I was sure I should have to go to Rome in connection with this affair, I went to the embassy of the Holy Father in Paris to get my passport visa'd. I was received by a little abbé, a man of about fifty, with an arid, frosty physiognomy, who heard me out with frigid civility and asked me to wait. Although I was in a hurry I sat down, took the *Opinion Nationale* out of my pocket and began reading the most atrocious abuse of Russia. In the meanwhile I heard someone come out of the next room and go upstairs to Monsignor. My abbé bowed to him. I turned to him and repeated my request. He again asked me, more coldly than ever, to wait. A short time after a man came in who was obviously a foreigner—an Austrian, I think. The abbé heard what he had to say, and he, too, was immediately taken upstairs. This irritated me. I rose, went over to the abbé, and told him firmly that, since Monsignor was receiving, he could deal with me, too. The abbé backed away from me in evident consternation. He simply failed to understand how an insignificant Russian dared to put himself on a level with visitors to Monsignor. Looking me up and down, he cried in the most insolent manner, as if delighted at the opportunity to insult me: "Do you really think Monsignor will put off drinking his coffee for

you?" Then I shouted, and a great deal louder than he had: "Allow me to inform you that I don't give a fig for your Monsignor's coffee! If you don't see to my passport this minute I shall go to him myself!"

"What! While he has the Cardinal with him?" cried the abbé, retreating from me in horror, and rushing to the door he spread his arms out to show that he would rather die than let me pass.

I then told him I was a heretic and a barbarian, "*que je suis hérétique et barbare*," and that all those archbishops, cardinals, and monsignors were nothing to me. In a word I let him see I did not intend to yield. The abbé glanced at me with boundless contempt but snatched my passport out of my hands and took it upstairs. A minute later it was visa'd.

"And here it is—would you like to look at it?" I took out my passport and showed the Roman visa.

"Well, I must say you..." began the General.

"You saved yourself by declaring you were a barbarian and a heretic," said the Frenchman with a chuckle. "*Cela n'était pas si bête*."

"Would you have me follow the example of Russian travellers? All they can do is to keep still, not daring to utter a word, almost ready to deny that they are Russians. Anyhow they began to treat me much more politely in the Paris hotel after I told them about my tiff with the abbé. A fat Polish gentleman, who had been more hostile to me than any of them at the *table d'hôte*, had to sing small. The Frenchmen even bore it when I told them that two years ago I had met a man whom a French chasseur had shot at in 1812, simply because he wanted to discharge his gun. The man was a little boy of ten at the time, and his family had not been able to get out of Moscow."

"That is impossible!" exclaimed the Frenchman, firing up. "A French soldier would never shoot at a child!"

"It is true, nevertheless," I replied. "It was told me by a respectable retired captain, and I saw the scar left by the bullet on his cheek."

The Frenchman began to deliver a rapid harangue. The General tried to support him, but I recommended him to look through—say—General Perovsky's notes, written in 1812 while he was a prisoner of the French. At last Marya Filippovna began talking about something else, so as to change the subject. The General was extremely displeased with me, for the Frenchman and I had begun almost shouting at one another. Mr. Astley, however, seemed to relish my argument with the Frenchman. Getting up, he invited me to drink a glass of wine with him. That evening, as was only right, I managed to get a quarter of an hour's talk with Paulina Alexandrovna. Our conversation took place during a walk. Everyone went through the park in the direction of the Kursaal. Paulina sat down on a bench opposite the fountain and allowed Nadya to play with some children not far away. I let Misha go to the fountain, too, and at last we were alone.

We began, of course, by speaking about business. Paulina was quite annoyed when I handed her only seven hundred guildens. She had been sure I would bring her at least two thousand guildens, if not more, after pawning her diamonds in Paris.

"I must have money at all costs," she said. "I've got to! Otherwise I am utterly undone!"

I began questioning her about what had happened in my absence.

"Nothing but two items of news which came from Petersburg, first saying that Babushka* was very bad, and two days later that she had apparently died. This came from Timofei Petrovich," added Paulina. "And he is a very reliable man. We are now expecting definite news."

* Granny.—*Tr.*

"So everybody here is in suspense?" I said.

"Of course! Everyone and everything! For the last six months they have been thinking of nothing else."

"And you?" I asked.

"Oh, I'm no relation at all, I'm only the General's step-daughter. But I know for certain she will remember me in her will."

"I think you'll get quite a lot," I assured her.

"Yes. She was very fond of me. But what makes *you* think so, I wonder?"

"Tell me," I countered, "is our Marquis also initiated in all the family secrets?"

"What makes you take such an interest in it all?" asked Paulina with a glance of cold severity.

"It's natural enough, isn't it? If I am not mistaken, the General has already managed to borrow from him."

"Your surmise is very true."

"Well, then, would he have lent him anything if he had not known about Babushka? Didn't you notice how he mentioned Babushka two or three times at table, and called her Babulenska—*la baboulinka!* What an intimate, friendly footing!"

"You are right. As soon as he learns that I, too, get something under the will, he'll propose to me—is that what you wanted to know?"

"I thought he had done that long ago!"

"You know very well he hasn't!" said Paulina angrily. "Where did you get to know that Englishman?" she added after a moment's pause.

"I knew you would be asking me that."

I told her of my former meetings with Mr. Astley on the way.

"He is shy and susceptible, and I can see he is in love with you."

"Yes, he's in love with me," replied Paulina.

"He is ten times as wealthy as the Frenchman, of course. By the way, is it quite certain that the Frenchie really has something? There isn't any doubt about it, is there?"

"None whatever. He has a château somewhere or other. The General told me about it quite definitely yesterday. Well—are you satisfied?"

"If I were you I would marry the Englishman."

"Why?" asked Paulina.

"The Frenchman is handsomer but he is also baser, and the Englishman, besides being honest, is ten times as rich," I said curtly.

"Yes, but then the Frenchman is a marquis and more intelligent," she replied calmly.

"Ah, but is it true?" I went on, pursuing my former line.

"Quite true."

Paulina found my questions extremely irksome and I could see, by the savage tone of her replies that she wished to anger me. I told her so.

"Well, it does amuse me when you get angry. Since I allow you to put such questions and make such surmises, you must pay for it somehow or other."

"I consider myself entitled to put any questions I like to you," I said calmly. "Simply because I am ready to pay any price, and no longer give a fig for my life."

Paulina laughed.

"You told me last time, on the Schlangenberg," she said, "that you were ready at a word from me to throw yourself down—it's about a thousand feet high, I believe. I will say that word some day, simply to see how you will pay, and you may be sure I will not quail. You are hateful to me, because I have allowed you so much, and all the more hateful, because I need you. But so long as I do need you, I must take care of you."

She got up. There was irritation in her voice. Of late

she had always ended up a conversation with me with irritation and rancour, real rancour.

"Do tell me who Mademoiselle Blanche is?" I asked, not wishing to let her go till I had found out everything.

"You know very well who Mademoiselle Blanche is—nothing fresh has happened since you were away. Mademoiselle Blanche will probably become the General's wife—of course only if the rumour of Babushka's death is confirmed, since Mademoiselle Blanche and her mamma and their third cousin the Marquis, all know very well that we are ruined."

"And is the General definitely in love?"

"That's not the point just now! Listen to what I say—take these seven hundred florins and go to the Kursaal and win as much as you can for me at roulette. I must have some money now at all costs!"

Having said this she called Nadya to her and walked over to the Kursaal, where she joined the rest of the company. I took the first path I came to on the left, and gave myself up to wondering meditation. The order to go and play roulette had been like a sudden blow. And strange to say, though I had plenty to think about, I could only plunge into an analysis of my feelings for Paulina. I realized that those two weeks of absence had been easier to bear than this day of my return, although I had been crazy with grief on the way, dreaming of her constantly and tossing madly. One day (it was in Switzerland), falling asleep in the train, I apparently held a conversation with Paulina, much to the amusement of the other passengers. And again I put the question to myself: do I love her? And again I was unable to answer, or rather, again I answered for the hundredth time, that I hated her. Yes, hated. There were moments (and these always came at the end of a talk with her) when I would have given half the days of my life to be able to strangle her. I swear that if it had been possible for me to plunge a sharp knife

slowly into her bosom, I would, I really think I would have found the utmost enjoyment in doing it. And yet I swear by all that is holy, that if she had really said to me at the fashionable *pointe* on the Schlangenberg: "Jump!" I would have jumped there and then, and even felt a pleasure in it. Of this I was sure. One way or another, this state of affairs must come to an end. She understands all this to a marvel, and the idea that I realize fully and distinctly her utter inaccessibility for myself, the utter impossibility of my dreams coming true—this idea, I am sure, affords her the utmost enjoyment. How otherwise could she, who is so discreet and clever, remain on such an intimate, frank footing with me? It seems to me that so far she has always regarded me as a certain empress of ancient times regarded her serf, in front of whom, not considering him to be a man, she used to undress. Yes, again and again she has shown that she does not consider me a man!

But there—I had her orders—to win at roulette at all costs. There was no time to wonder why this was so urgently needed, and what new considerations had arisen in this incessantly calculating brain. Moreover, during the two weeks of my absence a multitude of new circumstances, of which I as yet knew nothing, must have arisen. All this must be investigated and elucidated, and that as soon as possible. But for the moment there is no time—I must set off for the roulette table.

CHAPTER II

I confess I did not like it. While I had quite made up my mind to gamble, I had by no means intended making my debut on another's behalf. It quite upset me, and I entered the gambling hall with feelings of acute vexation. From the very first glance everything displeased me. I

despised the fawning articles appearing in the newspapers of all countries, and especially in Russia, where the journalists blossom out every spring in fulsome descriptions, first of the splendour and luxury of the gambling halls in the roulette towns on the Rhine, and next of the piles of gold said to lie about the tables. Nobody pays them to write all that—they do it from a mere desire to oblige. There is absolutely no splendour in these wretched halls, and not only are there no piles of gold on the tables, there is hardly any gold at all. True, here and there in the course of the season some eccentric individual—an Englishman or an Asiatic (this year it was a Turk)—may suddenly turn up and lose or win a lot of money. But all the others play for a few guildens, and very little money is seen on the tables as a rule. When, for the first time in my life, I entered the gambling hall, I could not make up my mind for some time to play. Besides the crowd jostled me so. But quite apart from this I think I would sooner have gone away than remained to gamble. I admit my heart was beating and I was far from indifferent. I had long ago made up my mind that I should not get away from Roulettenburg without some striking occurrence, and now I was quite certain of this. Some radical change, something decisive for my fate was bound to happen. It must and would be so. Absurd as it may sound for me to have expected such great results for myself from roulette, the universally accepted opinion that it is folly to expect anything from it seems to me still more absurd. And why is gambling worse than any other way of making money—commerce, for instance? True, only one in a thousand ever wins. But what is that to me?

Anyhow, I decided at first to watch and not to undertake anything serious that evening. Whatever happened today would be mere chance and on a small scale—I had made up my mind to that. Besides, I had to study the

game itself, for despite the thousand descriptions of roulette which I had read so eagerly, I understood nothing whatever about it till I saw it for myself.

The first thing that struck me was the squalor of everything; it was—in a moral sense, of course—so sordid. I am not speaking of the eager, nervous countenances surrounding the gaming tables by tens and by hundreds. I see nothing at all reprehensible in the desire to win as much and as soon as possible. The retort of a certain well-fed, prosperous moralist to the excuse proffered by someone: "After all, they risk so little!" that the pettiness only makes it worse, has always seemed very silly to me. I agree that there *is* a difference between petty greed and avarice on a big scale. But it's only a matter of proportion. What is petty for a Rothschild is a great deal for me, and as for the winnings and fortunes amassed—why, everywhere people do nothing but plunder one another, win from one another! Whether great sums and profits are in themselves disgusting is another question, and one which I will not attempt to solve just now. Since the craving to win had become almost an obsession with me, I felt, the moment I entered the room, all this greed, all this filth, if you will, to be most appropriate, most congenial. What could be more delightful than such a complete absence of ceremony, such unabashed frankness! Why go in for self-deception, that most hollow and futile of occupations? The thing that strikes one at first glance as peculiarly revolting in all this gambling rabble is their respect for what they are doing, the solemnity, almost amounting to reverence, with which everyone crowds up to the tables. In this attitude are to be traced the sharp distinctions drawn between what is known here as *mauvais genre* and *comme il faut*. There are two ways of gambling: one is gentlemanly, the other plebeian, avaricious, the way of the dregs of humanity. Distinctions are very sharp here, and there is something essentially

loathsome in these very distinctions. A gentleman, for instance, will stake five, sometimes ten louis d'ors, seldom higher; if very wealthy he may even put down a thousand francs, but it is all for the mere pleasure of the game, just for amusement, simply for the interest of observing the process of winning and losing, and he must not take the slightest interest in his own winnings. If he wins it is permissible for him to laugh, to say something to one of the onlookers, even to put the money down again, to redouble the stakes, but all out of mere curiosity, for the sake of following the vicissitudes of the game, of making entertaining calculations, not from any plebeian desire to win. In a word he must regard all the roulettes, the *trente et quarante* as nothing but a show got up for his sole pleasure. He must not have the slightest inkling of the avarice and accidents on which the bank is founded. He must affect to believe that all the other gamblers, all this human trash, trembling over a gulden, are as rich and as gentlemanly as himself, and only gamble for the sake of distraction. Such an utter ignorance of reality, such a naive attitude to others, would, of course, be excessively aristocratic. I watched the mammas pushing forward their daughters, innocent and elegant misses of fifteen and sixteen, and, placing a few gold coins in their hands, instructing them in the rules of the game. The young lady, whether she won or lost, invariably smiled and went away perfectly content. Our friend the General approached the table with pompous dignity. A servant rushed up to give him a chair, but he took no notice of the servant. Very slowly he drew his purse out of his pocket, and very slowly extracted from it three hundred gold francs, placed them on the black, and won. He did not pick up his winnings but left them on the table. Black came round again, and he did not pick up the money this time either. When the wheel stopped at red for the third time, he had lost one thousand two hundred francs in one spin. He moved

away smiling, as dignified as ever. I am quite sure he was really sick at heart—and if the stake had been two or three times higher he would not have been able to control himself, he would have betrayed his agitation. It is true I saw a Frenchman win and then gaily lose up to thirty thousand francs without the slightest sign of feeling. Money is considered so much beneath a gentleman's notice, as to be hardly worth troubling about. It is of course extremely aristocratic to ignore all this filth, all this trash, and all that is going on around. Quite the opposite attitude is, however, no less aristocratic—to observe, even to inspect, best of all through a lorgnette, the rabble, but only as if the whole crowd, all the filth, were a kind of entertainment, a performance got up for the amusement of the gentry. It is permissible to mingle with the crowd so long as you look about you with the utter conviction of being a mere spectator, and by no means part of it. By the way, it is not quite the thing to look too close, that would not be gentlemanly, this spectacle not being worth such close observation. And there are not many sights worthy of the close observation of a gentleman, you know! Personally I found it all well worth close observation, especially for one who had gone there not for the sake of mere observation, but who frankly and conscientiously included himself among these dregs of humanity. My own secret moral convictions, of course, have nothing to do with my present reflections. But never mind, I only mention them for my own satisfaction. One thing may be worth noting: of late I have felt extremely unwilling to measure up my deeds and thoughts against any moral standards. I am ruled by something quite different. . . .

There really is something sordid about the way the dregs of humanity gamble. I am even half-inclined to believe that quite a lot of ordinary thieving goes on at the tables. The croupiers seated at each end of the table watch the stakes and calculate the amounts—very hard work.

And what vile creatures they are—Frenchmen, most of them! But I am not making notes and observations for the purpose of describing roulette. I am just gathering information so as to know how to behave in the future. I have noticed for example that nothing is more usual than for a hand to be stretched across the table from behind and gather up all your winnings. An argument arises, shouts are not infrequent, and just try and prove the money is yours, find witnesses!

Everything was Greek to me at first. I could only vaguely make out that stakes are placed on numbers, odd and even, and on colours. I decided to risk a hundred of Paulina Alexandrovna's guldens that first evening. The idea that I was going to play for someone else put me out. It was an exceedingly unpleasant sensation and I wanted to shake it off as quickly as I could. I could not help thinking that by beginning for Paulina I was undermining my own luck. Is it really impossible to approach the gaming table without being infected by superstition? I began by taking out five friedrichsdors, that is to say, fifty guldens, and placed them on the evens. The wheel spun round and stopped at thirteen—I had lost. With a strange almost painful sensation, simply for the sake of getting it over and going, I placed another five friedrichsdors, this time on the red. Red turned up. I put the whole ten friedrichsdors back on the red, and again the wheel stopped at red. I put it all on the red again, and again red turned up. Receiving forty friedrichsdors I staked twenty on twelve middle numbers, just to see what would come of it. I won three times the sum I had staked. My ten friedrichsdors had become eighty. I was so overcome by this extraordinary and unfamiliar sensation that I decided to go. I could not help feeling that I would have played quite differently if it had been my own money. However, I placed the whole eighty friedrichsdors on the evens. This time four came round. Another eighty friedrichsdors was

poured out before me, and scraping up the whole pile, which came to a hundred and sixty friedrichsdors, I set off to look for Paulina.

They were all out walking in the park and I could not manage to speak to her till supper. This time the Frenchman was not there, and the General seemed more at his ease. He saw fit, by the way, to tell me again that he would not like to see me at the gaming tables. In his opinion he would be seriously compromised if I were to lose too conspicuously. "Even if you were to win a great deal, I should be compromised," he added significantly. "Of course I have no right to dictate to you, but you will agree. . . ." Here, as usual with him, he broke off in the middle of a sentence. I replied coldly that I had very little money and so could not lose much even if I did gamble. After I went upstairs to my own room I found an opportunity of giving Paulina her winnings and telling her that I would not play for her any more.

"Why not?" she enquired in alarm.

"Because I want to gamble on my own account," I replied, looking at her in surprise, "and I couldn't do that if I had to play for you too."

"So you still definitely consider that roulette is your only hope of salvation?" she asked mockingly. I replied, as gravely as before, that I did. That I agreed that my conviction of success might be ridiculous, but that I wished to be "let alone."

Paulina insisted on my taking half of today's winnings, and handing me eighty friedrichsdors proposed that I continue playing on similar conditions for the future. I firmly and finally refused to take half, declaring that I could not play for anyone else, not because I did not wish to, but because I was sure to lose.

"And yet, foolish as it may sound, I too place my hopes almost solely on roulette," she said after a pause. "And

so you simply must go on playing half and half with me, and you will, of course." Here she left me without heeding my further protests.

CHAPTER III

And yet she said not a word about roulette to me yesterday. In fact she avoided me the whole day. Her attitude to me has not changed. The same utter indifference during chance contacts, with a touch of scorn and dislike. She makes not the slightest attempt to conceal her dislike of me; I can see that. And yet she does not attempt to conceal from me either that she needs me, or that she is reserving me for something. A strange kind of relationship has sprung up between us, and one in many ways incomprehensible to me—especially when I remember the hauteur with which she treats everyone. She knows, for example, that I love her to distraction, even allows me to speak of my passion—and of course nothing shows her contempt for me so much as this permission to speak freely of my love. "This means I hold your feelings so light that I simply don't care what you say to me and what you feel for me." Of her own affairs she has always told me a great deal, without, however, being completely frank. Moreover, the following refinements of her contempt for me have been displayed: she knows, let us say, that I am aware of certain facts about her life, of something or other that causes her intense anxiety; she will even confide in me, if she requires to use me for her own ends, like a slave or an errand-boy. But she tells me only just what a messenger requires to know, and though there are still all sorts of happenings that I know nothing about, and she herself sees how I share her own torments and anxieties, she never deigns to set me altogether at rest by friendly confidence, although, since she frequently entrusts me with

missions which, besides being tiresome, are even dangerous, I consider she might at least be frank with me. But why should she care what I feel, or whether I worry, too, and perhaps worry and fret about her cares and mishaps even more than she does herself?

I have known for three weeks of her intention to play roulette. She has even warned me that I am to play for her, because it would not be proper for her to play. From the way she spoke I at once realized that there is something weighing on her mind, that this is no mere desire for money. What is money in itself to her? There must be some aim, some circumstances as to which I can only form vague surmises, which I know nothing about as yet. The abasement and slavery in which she keeps me entitle me to ask her outright without making any bones about it. Since I am her slave and utterly insignificant in her eyes, she has no right to be offended by my crude inquisitiveness. But while she allows me to ask whatever I like, she never answers my questions. Sometimes she seems not to hear them. That's how things are between us.

Yesterday the telegram sent to Petersburg four days ago, to which no answer has yet been received, was the subject of constant talk among us. The General seems to be uneasy and thoughtful. It's all about Babushka, of course. The Frenchman is agitated, too. Yesterday, for example, they had a long serious talk after dinner. The Frenchman treats us all with the utmost superciliousness and contempt. He is a living example of the proverb: give some people an inch and they take an ell. Even with Paulina he is abrupt to the point of rudeness. He is, however, always glad to take part in walks to the Kursaal, or in rides and excursions to the country. I have known for a long time of certain things connecting the Frenchman and the General. At one time they had been going to set up some factory together in Russia. I don't know whether their plans went astray or not, or whether they are still

discussing them. As well as this I have stumbled, quite by accident, on a family secret—the Frenchman really did help the General out last year, lending him thirty thousand rubles to make up the deficit in official funds when the General resigned his post. And so, obviously, the General is in his power; at this particular moment, however, the main role in all this belongs, after all, to Mademoiselle Blanche—and I am sure I am not mistaken about this, either.

Who is Mademoiselle Blanche? Here, in Roulettenburg, she is supposed to be a distinguished Frenchwoman, with a mother and vast possessions. It is also known that she is some sort of relative of our Marquis—but a very distant one, perhaps a cousin three times removed. Before my journey to Paris they say the Frenchman and Mademoiselle Blanche used to treat one another with much more ceremony and seemed to be on more delicate and subtle terms. But now their acquaintance, their friendship, and relationship, appears to have become as it were cruder, more intimate. Perhaps they consider our affairs to be in such a bad way that they see no reason for standing on ceremony, or keeping up appearances before us. Only the day before yesterday I caught Mr. Astley studying Mademoiselle Blanche and her mother. It struck me that he knew them. It even seemed to me that our Frenchman had met Mr. Astley before, too. But Mr. Astley is so shy, so bashful and taciturn, that he can be absolutely relied upon—he is not one to drag private matters into the light of day. However this may be, the Frenchman scarcely greets him and hardly ever looks his way, so apparently he is not afraid of him. Well, an explanation for this might be found, but why does Mademoiselle Blanche, too, hardly ever look at him? And yesterday the Marquis gave himself away—he suddenly said, in the course of general conversation (I can't remember what brought the subject up), that Mr. Astley was incredibly wealthy, and that he knew

this for a fact. Surely this should make Mademoiselle Blanche look at Mr. Astley sometimes! The General seems to be all the time in a state of anxiety. It is obvious that a telegram announcing his aunt's death would mean a great deal to him just now.

Although I am almost certain that Paulina avoids me with a special purpose, I nevertheless assume a cold and indifferent air, hoping against hope that she will come up to me herself any minute. But the whole of yesterday, and today too, I mainly devoted to the study of Mademoiselle Blanche. The poor General—he is quite done for! To fall in love at the age of fifty-five, and so violently, is certainly a disaster. Add to this that he is a widower, that he has children, a completely ruined estate, debts, and last but not least, consider the kind of woman he has had the bad luck to fall in love with! Mademoiselle Blanche is very good-looking. But—I am not sure if I shall make myself understood—she has one of those faces which are rather terrifying. I for one have always been afraid of such women. She is probably about twenty-five. She is tall and broad-shouldered; her neck and bust are exquisite; she has a dusky complexion, and her hair is blue-black and extremely abundant—enough for two women. Her eyes are black, the whites yellowish, the glance insolent, her teeth are dazzlingly white, her lips always rouged, and she smells of musk. She dresses showily, expensively, with chic, but at the same time with great taste. Her hands and feet are marvellous. Her voice is a husky contralto. When she laughs she shows all her teeth, but as a rule she is silent and insolent-looking—at any rate in front of Paulina and Marya Filippovna. (Strange rumour—Marya Filippovna is going back to Russia!) I believe Mademoiselle Blanche to be quite uneducated, perhaps not even intelligent, but however that may be she is suspicious and cunning. I believe, too, that her life has not been without adventures. If the truth were to be told, perhaps the Mar-

quis is no relation of hers, and her mother is not her mother at all. There are however indications that in Berlin, where we met them, her mother and she had several quite presentable acquaintances. As for the Marquis, though I still doubt whether he is a marquis, there seems to be no sort of doubt as to his belonging to the very best society, both in Moscow and some parts of Germany. What he is in France, I do not know. They say he has a château. During these two weeks much seems to have occurred and yet I still do not know for certain whether anything definite has passed between Mademoiselle Blanche and the General. Everything now depends on our fortune, that is to say, on the General's ability to show that he has a great deal of money. If, for instance, the news were to arrive that Babushka is not dead, I am sure Mademoiselle Blanche would vanish immediately. But I am quite surprised and amused to see what a gossip I have become. Oh, how I hate all this sort of thing! With what pleasure I would give up everyone and everything! But how am I to leave Paulina? How can I help spying on her? Spying is of course base, but what is that to me?

During the last two days Mr. Astley has been a great source of interest to me, too. Yes, I'm quite sure he is in love with Paulina! It is curious to see how ludicrously expressive the glance of a bashful and morbidly puritanical man can be when he is in love, especially when such a man would sooner sink through the ground than give himself away by word or glance. Mr. Astley is always coming across us on our walks. He takes off his hat and passes on, dying of course to join us. If invited, however, he immediately refuses. At the places where people sit about—in front of the Kursaal, near the band-stand or the fountain—he is always sure to be somewhere in the vicinity of the benches where we sit, and whether we are in the park, in the woods, or on the Schlangenbergr, we only

have to lift our eyes and look around, and invariably somewhere or other, either on the nearest pathway, or behind a bush, can be seen a little bit of Mr. Astley! I think he is seeking an opportunity to have a private talk with me. This morning we met and exchanged a few words. His speech is sometimes wonderfully abrupt. Without even saying good morning he burst out with:

"Mademoiselle Blanche—oh, I've seen plenty of women like Mademoiselle Blanche!"

Then he paused, looking at me significantly. What he meant to say by this I do not know, because to my question—what do you mean?—he only nodded, and said with a sly smile: "You can take it from me. Is Mademoiselle Paulina fond of flowers?"

"I don't know. I have no idea!" I replied.

"What? You don't even know that?" he cried, evidently much surprised.

"No. I have never noticed," I repeated, laughing.

"H'm, that gives me an idea." Here he nodded and walked on. But he looked very pleased. We converse in abominable French.

CHAPTER IV

Today has been a ridiculous, outrageous, absurd day. It is now eleven p. m. and I am sitting in my tiny cell and going over in my mind everything that happened. It began by my being forced to go to the Kursaal to play for Paulina. I took all her hundred and sixty friedrichsdors but made two conditions—the first that I would not play half and half, that is to say, if I won I would take nothing, and the second that Paulina would explain to me in the evening why she so badly needed to win and precisely how much money she required. Somehow I could not believe that it was just for the sake of money. Obviously, money

was needed, and that as soon as possible, for some particular purpose. She promised to do this and I set off. The crowd in the gaming rooms was terrific. How shameless they are, and how avaricious! I pushed my way into the middle of the room and stood just next to one of the croupiers. Then I began timidly trying my luck, staking two or three coins at a time, and all the while watching the crowd and making observations. It seemed to me that calculations mean very little and are not nearly so important as many gamblers consider them. They sit there with ruled paper, noting the numbers, counting, reckoning chances, calculating, before putting down their money, and they lose just like us mere mortals, who play without making any calculations. But I did draw one conclusion, which seems to me to be true—there really does appear to be, among a series of chance phenomena, something which, though it may not be a system, is a kind of order, which is, of course, very strange. For instance, after coming to a stop at the twelve middle numbers, the ball sometimes stops at twelve high ones twice running, and moves back to the twelve lowest. It then switches to the twelve middle numbers three or four times running, before going back to the last twelve, where it stops twice again, and returns only once to the first twelve, after which it proceeds to the middle numbers and stops there three times running; and thus it may go on for an hour and a half or even two hours. Once-thrice-twice, once-thrice-twice, it is very amusing, really. Sometimes, for instance, for a whole day, or at least a whole morning, the ball keeps shifting from black to red and from red to black without any apparent regularity, hardly ever stopping more than twice at either. And then there will be a day, or an evening, when nothing but red turns up—twenty-two times running, let us say. Mr. Astley, who stood all the morning at the tables, without once staking anything explained many things to me. As for me, I lost

everything to the last farthing, and that extremely soon. I put twenty friedrichsdors on the evens all at once, and won, left my winnings there, and again won, and so on two or three times running. I believe about four hundred friedrichsdors came into my hands in some five minutes. This was the time for me to have left, but a strange sensation sprang up in me, a kind of challenge to fate, a desire to thumb my nose, to put out my tongue at it. I placed the highest stake permitted, four thousand guldens, and lost them all. Then, warming up, I took out all the rest I had, placed it on the same number and lost again, after which I went away from the tables, stunned. I hardly realized what had happened, and waited till just before dinner-time to tell Paulina of my losses. Up till then I had hung about the park.

During dinner I was in the same state of excitement as three days ago. The Frenchman and Mademoiselle Blanche were again dining with us. Mademoiselle Blanche, it appeared, was in the gaming rooms in the morning and witnessed my feats. She now treated me with somewhat more attention. The Frenchman was more direct and asked me point-blank if it had really been my own money that I lost. I think he suspects Paulina. Anyhow there's more than meets the eye, here. I lied promptly and said it was my own.

The General was extremely surprised—where had I got hold of so much money? I explained that I had begun with ten friedrichsdors, that six or seven times on the two had brought me up to five or six thousand guldens and that I had then lost it all in two spins.

This of course was quite plausible. During my explanation I glanced at Paulina but could make nothing of her expression. She did not contradict me, however, from which I concluded that I was right in concealing the fact that I had been gambling on her behalf. In any case, I

told myself, she owed me an explanation and had promised to tell me something.

I thought the General would deal me out some sort of reproof, but he said nothing, though I observed signs of agitation and anxiety in his face. Perhaps he could not bear, in his own straitened circumstances, to hear of such respectable sums of money passing through the hands of a reckless fool like me in a quarter of an hour.

I suspect there was a violent encounter between him and the Frenchman last night. They had a hot argument behind locked doors. The Frenchman came out of the room looking very irate, and this morning he again secreted himself with the General, no doubt to continue yesterday's discussion.

Hearing of my losses the Frenchman remarked caustically, not to say spitefully, that one should be more careful. And added, quite gratuitously I consider, that though Russians gamble a great deal, in his opinion they have not the slightest idea how to do it.

"And in my opinion roulette must have been created solely for Russians," said I, and when the Frenchman laughed scornfully, I told him that the truth was certainly on my side, since in calling Russians gamblers I abused them much more than I praised them, and that therefore I was to be believed.

"What is your opinion based on?" asked the Frenchman.

"On the fact that among the virtues and qualities of civilized Western man, the ability to amass capital is a historical development, and almost the most important item in the whole list. Now, not only are Russians incapable of amassing capital, they even spend it foolishly and clumsily. And yet we Russians need money, too," I added, "and consequently we are very glad of, and are extremely addicted to, any means such as roulette, by which wealth may suddenly be accrued, in an hour or two, without

working for it. We find this exceedingly alluring, and since we gamble thoughtlessly and effortlessly, why—we lose!”

“There is some justice in that,” said the complacent Frenchman.

“No, there is no justice in it, and you should be ashamed to speak of your native land like that,” said the General sternly and imposingly.

“But why?” I asked, “after all who is to say which is beastlier—the outrageous recklessness of the Russian, or the German ability to amass money by honest labour?”

“What atrocious sentiments!” exclaimed the General.

“What Russian sentiments!” exclaimed the Frenchman.

I laughed. I felt a strong desire to ruffle their tempers.

“I would rather spend my whole life in a Kirghiz tent,” I cried, “than bow to the German idol!”

“What idol?” cried the General, beginning to get angry in good earnest.

“The German way of amassing wealth. I haven’t been here long, and yet the things I have been able to note and verify make my Tatar blood boil. I swear I have no use for such virtues! Only yesterday I walked all round this place—some eight miles in all—and it’s exactly like German illustrated moral tales. Every home has its *Vater*, awfully virtuous and incredibly honest. So honest that you hardly dare to approach him. I can’t stand honest people one is afraid to approach. Every *Vater* has his family, and in the evenings they all read aloud from instructive books. Elms and chestnut-trees rustle over the roof of the house. Sunset, a stork on the chimney, everything wonderfully poetic and affecting.

“Now, don’t be angry with me, General! Allow me to be sentimental. I remember how my father used to read such books to me and my mother in the garden of an evening, under the limes. . . . So you see, I do know what I’m talk-

ing about. Well, and so every family here lives in utter slavery and subjection to its *Vater*. They all work like oxen and save money like Jews. The *Vater*, say, has already saved up so many guldens, and all for the eldest son, to give him a trade or buy him a plot of land. And so the daughter gets no dowry, and remains an old maid. And the youngest son is sold into slavery or goes for a soldier, and his money is added to the family capital. That's what goes on, really it does—I have made inquiries. And all out of sheer honesty, out of an excess of honesty, the youngest son himself believes that he has been sold for the sake of nothing but honesty, and isn't this ideal—for the victim himself to rejoice that he is being led to the slaughter! What next? Next comes the fact that things are no better for the eldest—he has his Amälchen, with whom he is joined through his feelings—but he cannot marry because not enough guldens have yet been saved up. They too wait piously, and allow themselves to be led, smiling, to the slaughter. Amälchen's cheeks grow hollow, she begins to wither. At last, in twenty years' time, prosperity is achieved, the guldens honestly and virtuously amassed. *Vater* blesses the forty-year-old eldest son and the thirty-five-year-old Amälchen, with her flat breasts and red nose . . . sheds tears, moralizes, and dies. The eldest son himself becomes a virtuous *Vater*, and the whole story begins all over again. By fifty or perhaps seventy years the grandson of the first *Vater* has amassed considerable capital which he hands down to his son, his son hands it to *his* son, and so on, and in about five or six generations Baron Rothschild himself, or Hoppe and Co.,* or God knows who, is born. Well, isn't that a magnificent spectacle—a hundred or two hundred years of labour from one generation to another, patience, brains, honesty, character, endurance, calculations, the stork on the roof!

* Dutch-English banking firm founded in the 18th century.—*Ed.*

What more do you want—how much higher could one get? And from this height they themselves begin to judge the whole world—and the guilty, that is to say, those who differ ever so slightly from themselves, are instantly annihilated. So you see I would rather waste my substance like a Russian, or amass a fortune at roulette. I don't want to be a Hoppe and Co. at the end of five generations. I want money for myself, and I do not regard myself as a kind of accessory for the amassing of capital. I know I've been talking a lot of nonsense, but never mind! These are my convictions."

"I don't know if there is any truth in what you say," remarked the General, thoughtfully, "but I do know that you begin to give yourself intolerable airs the moment you let yourself go in the very least...."

As usual he did not complete his thought. If our General begins saying something which is in the slightest degree more significant than the usual conversation, he never finishes what he is saying. The Frenchman listened carelessly, his eyes bulging slightly. He had understood scarcely a word of what I said. Paulina looked at me with supercilious indifference. She seemed not to hear a word I or anybody else said at the table that day.

CHAPTER V

She was plunged in profound thought, but as soon as we left the table she bade me accompany her in her walk. We took the children and made for the fountain in the park.

In my extraordinary state of excitement I burst out rudely and foolishly with the question: how was it that the Frenchie, our Marquis de Grie, not only never accompanied her now when she went out, but had scarcely spoken to her for days on end?

"Because he's a cad," she answered strangely. I had never before heard her speak like this of de Grie and said nothing, afraid to get at the meaning of her irritability.

"Did you notice that he and the General were at odds today?"

"You wish to know what it's all about," she replied coldly and irately. "You know the General has mortgaged everything away, his whole estate belongs to the Marquis, and if Babushka doesn't die, the Frenchman will immediately take up the mortgages and enter into possession of the property."

"So it's really true that everything is mortgaged? I heard it was, but did not know that absolutely everything was."

"Why, of course it is!"

"And so farewell Mademoiselle Blanche!" I said. "She won't be the General's lady now. D'you know what—I think the General is so much in love that he'll probably shoot himself if Mademoiselle Blanche throws him over. At his age it is dangerous to fall in love like that."

"Yes, I really believe it will end badly for him," said Paulina, musingly.

"Isn't that splendid?" I cried. "It's the crudest possible way of showing that she only meant to marry him for his money! The merest common decency has been flouted, all ceremony has been dispensed with. Marvellous! And as for Babushka, what could be more comic, more disgusting, than to send telegram after telegram asking: 'Isn't she dead? Isn't she dead?' How d'you like that, Paulina Alexandrovna, eh?"

"That's all nonsense," she said, interrupting me with an air of disgust. "What surprises me is that you should be in such high spirits. What has made you so happy? Can it be because you have lost all my money?"

"Why did you give it to me to lose? I told you I couldn't play for others, especially for you. I will do whatever you

tell me, but the result does not depend on me. I warned you it would be no good. Tell me, are you dreadfully upset to have lost such a lot of money? What did you need so much for?"

"What's the use of all these questions?"

"But you promised to explain to me.... Listen, I am perfectly certain that as soon as I begin playing on my own account (and I have twelve friedrichsdors) I shall win. Then you can take as much as you like from me."

She made a scornful grimace.

"Don't be angry with me for this offer," I went on. "I am so penetrated with the consciousness that I am nothing to you, I mean in your eyes, that you need not even mind taking money from me. You can't be offended by a gift from me. Besides, I lost your money."

She shot a rapid glance at me and, realizing that my words were bitter and sarcastic, interrupted me again.

"There is nothing of interest to you in my circumstances. If you wish to know I am simply in debt. I have borrowed money and I should like to return it. I had a strange crazy notion that I was sure to win here at the gaming tables. Where I got hold of it I cannot tell, but I believed in it. Who knows, perhaps it was only because I saw no other chance."

"Or perhaps because you *needed* too badly to win. Like a drowning man catching at a straw. You will agree that if he had not been drowning he would never have taken a straw for a log of wood."

My words seemed to astonish Paulina.

"What?" she asked. "And did not you count on just the same thing yourself? Only a fortnight ago you told me at great length that you were absolutely certain to win at the roulette table here, and tried to persuade me not to regard you as a madman. Were you joking then? As I remember it, you were perfectly serious, so what you said then cannot possibly be taken for a joke."

"That's true," I replied thoughtfully, "and I am still perfectly sure I shall win. I don't mind telling you that what you say makes me wonder that my idiotic, outrageous losses today should not have left the slightest doubt in my mind. I am still perfectly certain that the moment I begin to play on my own, I am sure to win."

"What makes you so confident?"

"To tell the truth I don't know myself. I only know that I *must* win, that there is no other way out for me. Perhaps that is why I feel as if I were bound to win."

"So *you* must need to win very badly, too, since you are so fantastically sure of it."

"I see you can't believe me to be capable of taking anything seriously."

"It's all the same to me," replied Paulina quietly and indifferently. "If you like—why, yes, it's true. I cannot believe that anything serious is worrying you. You are capable of worrying, but not seriously. You are ill-regulated and unbalanced. What do you need money for? In all the reasons you then gave I could not find anything serious."

"By the way," I interrupted, "you said you had a debt you wanted to repay. Quite a debt, it seems! Is it to the Frenchman by any chance?"

"How dare you ask me questions! You're very rude today. You're not drunk, are you?"

"I say whatever comes into my head, you know, and my questions are sometimes very frank. I repeat, I am your slave, and nobody feels shame in front of a slave, you can't feel insulted by a slave!"

"That's all nonsense, I can't bear that slave theory of yours!"

"Kindly note that I speak of my slavery not because I ever wanted to be your slave, I simply mention it as a fact quite beyond my control."

"Tell me straight out—what do you need money for?"

"Why do you want to know?"

"Just as you like," she replied with a proud movement of her head.

"You can't bear the slave theory, and yet you demand slavish obedience. Don't argue—answer! Good, so be it! Why do I need money, you ask? And I reply—money is everything."

"I know that, but surely the desire for it need not drive you mad! You are on the verge of frenzy, of fatalism, yourself. There must be something here, some particular aim. Speak plainly, I insist on it."

She seemed to be getting angry and I enjoyed watching her temper rise as she questioned me.

"Of course there's an aim," I said, "but I don't know how to explain what it is. It's simply that when I have money I shall become another person, no longer a slave, even in your eyes."

"What? How will you achieve that?"

"How? Does it seem so incredible that I should ever be able to make you regard me otherwise than as a slave? Why, it's just this amazement and incredulity of yours that I find so trying."

"You said this slavery was a pleasure to you. And I thought so, too."

"Did you?" I cried in strange delight. "Oh, how I like such naïveté from you! Yes, yes, slavery to you is my greatest pleasure. There is pleasure in the lowest depths of abasement and insignificance," I raved on. "God knows, perhaps there is pleasure in the whip when the lash tears the flesh from one's back.—But supposing I want to try other pleasures, too? The General saw fit, just now, for the seven hundred rubles a year which I may or may not get from him, to lecture me in front of everyone at table. The Marquis de Grie raised his eyebrows and looked through me. Who knows, perhaps I passionately desire to pull the Marquis' nose in front of you?"

"The words of a milksop. One can make oneself respected in any situation. If it costs a struggle, it is elevating and not debasing."

"Straight out of a copybook! But what if I am unable to make myself respected? That is to say, I may be worthy of respect but do not know how to behave with dignity. You can't believe that this is possible? Why, all Russians are like that, and I will tell you why. It is because Russians are too gifted, too many-sided, to be able to find the proper form for themselves at once. Everything's a matter of form. We Russians are almost all of us so talented that no form but the one appropriate to genius will do. But most of us are not geniuses, for the simple reason that geniuses are not born every day. It is only the French, and perhaps a few other Europeans, who have so well-defined a conception of form that they are able to look remarkably dignified and yet be utterly worthless. That's why form means so much to them. The French will endure insult, real, mortal insult, without turning a hair, but will never get over a fillip on the nose, for that is the infringement on the accepted, immemorial forms of decency. It is just because of form that our young women have such a weakness for the French. Now, I consider they have no form at all, nothing but *le coque gaulois*. But of course I don't understand all that, I'm not a woman. A *coque* may be attractive too, perhaps. And altogether I may be talking nonsense and you let me run on. You should stop me. When I talk to you I want to say everything, everything. I lose all sense of form. I am ready to agree that not only have I no form, but I have no virtues whatever. I declare this to you. I don't even bother myself about virtues. Everything has come to a standstill in me now. You know yourself, why. I have not a single human thought in my head. It's ages since I knew what was going on, either in Russia or here. I passed through Dresden, and I can't remember anything about Dresden. You know yourself what I am absorbed

in. Since I have no hope whatever and am nothing in your eyes, I can tell you frankly—I see nothing but you, nothing else counts for me. Why I love you so, I do not know. Perhaps you're not a bit nice, really! Fancy, I don't even know if you're nice or not, even to look at! Your heart is probably not at all nice, your mind anything but noble. This is quite likely."

"Perhaps you think you can buy me with money," she said, "because you don't believe in my goodness?"

"When did I think I could buy you with money?" I cried.

"You let your tongue run away with you, and now you've lost your thread. Perhaps you hope to buy, not me, but my respect, with money."

"That's not exactly it. I told you I should have trouble in explaining. You overwhelm me. Don't be angry at my chatter. Why you mustn't be angry with me, you know—I'm just a madman. But after all, I don't mind even if you are angry. I only have to think, to conjure up the rustle of your skirts, up there in my cell, and I am ready to bite my hands. Why should you be angry with me? Because I have called myself your slave? Exploit my slavery, use me, use me! Do you know, I shall kill you one day, not because I shall ever stop loving you, not from a sudden fit of jealousy. No, I shall kill you, because I sometimes feel like eating you up. You laugh—"

"I'm not laughing at all," she said furiously. "I command you to be silent."

She stopped, almost breathless with rage. I vow I do not know whether she was handsome, but I always loved to look at her when she stood in front of me like that, and so I was very fond of making her angry. Perhaps she had noticed this, and only pretended to be angry. I told her my thoughts.

"How beastly!" she cried in disgust.

"I don't care," I continued, "I'll tell you what—it's dangerous for us to go out alone. Several times I have had an almost unconquerable impulse to beat you, to disfigure you, to strangle you. And do you think it will never come to that? You will drive me to frenzy. Do you think I am afraid of a row, of your anger? What do I care for your anger? I love you hopelessly and I know that afterwards I would love you a thousand times more. If I ever do kill you, I shall have to kill myself, too, of course. Well then, I would put off killing myself as long as possible, so as to indulge in the intolerable pain of being without you. Shall I tell you something incredible—I love you more and more every day, and that's almost impossible you know. How can I help being a fatalist after that? Do you remember how I whispered to you the other day on the Schlangenberg when you teased me: 'Say the word, and I will leap into this abyss'? If you had said the word, then, I would have jumped. Can it be you don't believe I would have jumped?"

"What preposterous nonsense!" she cried.

"I don't care whether it's nonsense or not!" I cried. "I know that when I am with you I must talk, talk, talk—and so I talk. I lose all my self-respect when I am with you and I don't care."

"Why should I tell you to jump from the Schlangenberg?" she said coldly with offensive emphasis. "That would be utterly useless to me."

"Splendid!" I cried. "You said 'utterly useless' just to crush me. I can see right through you. Useless, you say? But you know pleasure is always a good thing, and savage, boundless power—even over a fly—is a kind of pleasure, too. Man is a tyrant by nature and loves to torture. You adore it."

I remember she looked at me very attentively indeed. All my idiotic, ridiculous sensations must have shown clearly in my face. Now I remember that our conversation

was almost word for word as I have given it. My eyes were bloodshot. There was foam at the corners of my mouth. And as for the Schlangenberg, I pledge my honour, even now—if she had then told me to throw myself down, I should have done it. Even if she had only said it in fun, or scornfully, spitting at me—I would have jumped.

"Why not?" she said, as only she knew how, so scornfully, so scathingly, so superciliously, that, by God, I could have killed her at that moment! She was taking a risk. When I told her that, it wasn't a lie either.

"Are you a coward?" she asked suddenly.

"I don't know, perhaps I am. I don't know.... I haven't thought about it for a long time."

"If I said to you: kill that man, would you do it?"

"What man?"

"Anyone I like."

"The Frenchman?"

"Don't ask—answer me! Whoever I name! I want to know whether you really meant what you said just now." The gravity, the evident suspense with which she waited for me to answer struck me as very strange.

"Tell me, for goodness' sake, what is going on here?" I cried. "Are you afraid of me or what? I can see things are going wrong. You are the stepdaughter of a man who is ruined and mad, who is passionately in love with that devil Blanche; and then there's that Frenchman with his mysterious influence over you, and now you put me such a question, so seriously. I want at least to know; otherwise I shall go mad, and do something awful. D'you mean to say you can't bring yourself to be frank with me? As if I could make you feel ashamed!"

"I'm not speaking to you about that at all. I asked you a question and I want an answer."

"Kill? Of course I would!" I cried. "Anyone you tell me to, but could you really, would you really tell me to?"

"Do you think I would spare you? I would give the order and stay in the background myself. Have you the spirit for it? Not you! You might perhaps kill to order, but then you would come and kill me for having dared to order you."

My head seemed to go round at these words. Of course even then I took her question half in jest, as a challenge. All the same I knew she was serious. And yet I was astonished to hear her admit so openly her right to order me about, her consent to exercise such power over me, to say: go to your death, and I will stay in the background—there was something cynically frank in these words, it was really going too far. What does she take me for, after all? This had gone beyond the limits of slavery and abasement. After treating anyone like this, all that was left was to raise him to one's own level. And so, ridiculous, fantastic, though our whole conversation had been, I was nevertheless shaken to the soul.

Suddenly she burst out laughing. We were sitting on a bench near the children at their play, just opposite the place where carriages drew up and deposited their passengers at the end of the avenue in front of the Kursaal.

"Do you see that fat woman?" she cried. "She's the Baroness Wurmerhelm. She only arrived three days ago. That's her husband, the tall, raw-boned Prussian, holding a stick. Do you remember how he looked at us the other day? Go right up to the Baroness, take off your hat, and say something to her in French."

"What for?"

"You swore you would jump from the Schlangenberg, you said you are ready to kill at my order. Instead of all these murders and tragedies I only want to laugh. Go without another word. I want to see the Baron strike you with his stick."

"You challenge me, you think I won't do it?"

"Yes, I challenge you. Go, I insist."

"Very well, I will, though it's a wild idea. But don't you think it might make trouble for the General, and through him for you? I swear I am not thinking of myself, but of you, and, well, of the General. And what's the idea of insulting a woman?"

"I see it was all words," she said scornfully. "Perhaps your eyes only filled with blood just now because you drank so much wine at dinner. As if I didn't know it's stupid and vulgar, and how angry the General would be! I only want to laugh. That's all! But how could you insult a woman? You're more likely to get a thrashing yourself."

I turned and went in silence to fulfil her behest. Of course it was idiotic, and of course I should have wriggled out of it, but as I approached the Baroness I remember a sensation of dare-devil recklessness, yes, schoolboy recklessness. Besides I was in a terrific state of excitement, as if I were drunk.

CHAPTER VI

Two days have now passed since that foolish incident. And the hubbub, the noise, the talk, the bangings on the table! The disorder, the confusion, the folly, the vulgarity—and all on my account! And yet sometimes it all seems quite funny—at least I find it so. I should like to know what really is going on inside me, whether I'm mad in good earnest, or have merely gone astray, and ought to be chained up till I learn to behave. Sometimes I feel as if my mind were affected. At other times I am inclined to believe that all this only means that I haven't come very far from childhood, from the school bench, that I am simply skylarking.

It was all Paulina's fault! But for her, perhaps, there would have been no skylarking. Who knows, perhaps I

did it all from sheer despair! (Stupid as it is to argue thus!) And I cannot, I simply cannot understand what it is I see in her. Of course she's very beautiful; at any rate, she seems to be. After all I'm not the only one she has driven mad. She's tall and slender, if she is a bit too thin. She makes you feel as if she could be tied up in a knot, or bent double. Her feet are long and narrow—tantalizing! Tantalizing, that's what they are! Her hair reddish. Her eyes, real cat's eyes, but what proud supercilious glances they can cast! Four months ago when I had only just entered their service, she had a long excited conversation in the ball-room one evening with de Grie and she gave him such a look that afterwards, when I had gone up to bed, I imagined she had given him a box on the ear—had only just done it and was standing looking at him—from that evening I began to love her.

But I must not digress.

I went along the path to the avenue, and, standing in the middle of it, waited for the Baroness and the Baron. When they were within five paces of me, I took off my hat and bowed.

I remember the Baroness wore a very full dress of grey silk, with flounces and frills, a crinoline and a train. She was very short and remarkably fat, especially her chin, which drooped so as quite to hide her neck. Her face was crimson. Her eyes were small, bad-tempered, and insolent. And she strutted along as if she were doing everyone an honour. The Baron was tall and lean. His features, as is so common among Germans, were crooked, and there were thousands of tiny wrinkles all over his face. He wore glasses; he was about forty-five. His legs began almost from his chest—breeding, you know. As proud as a peacock. A bit baggy. Something sheeplike that could almost be taken for thoughtfulness in his expression.

All this flashed before my eyes in a few seconds.

My bow and the fact that I was holding my hat in my hands, at first scarcely attracted their attention. The Baron frowned ever so slightly, that was all, the Baroness went straight on, ignoring me.

"*Madame la baronne,*" I said loudly and clearly, enunciating every syllable distinctly. "*J'ai l'honneur d'être votre esclave.*"

With this I bowed, put on my hat again, and walked past the Baron, turning my face politely towards him and smiling.

She had told me to take off my hat, the bowing and skylarking had been my own contribution. God knows what made me do it. It was like running downhill. I could not stop.

"Hey!" cried, or rather barked the Baron, turning towards me in angry astonishment.

I turned to him and stood as if in courteous expectation, still looking at him and smiling. Obviously taken aback, he drew his brows together till they could not get any nearer. His face darkened visibly. The Baroness turned towards me, too, gazing at me in wrathful indignation. The passers-by looked at us. Some actually stopped.

"Hey! Hey!" The Baron, now doubly furious, gave a kind of double bark.

"*Jawohl!*" I drawled, still looking straight into his eyes.

"*Sind sie rasend?*" he cried, shaking his stick, but he seemed a little nervous. Perhaps my clothes disconcerted him. I was very well dressed, even a little dandified, like a person from the best circles.

"*Jawo—o—ohl!*" I shouted again with all my might, drawling the "o" as they do in Berlin, where all conversation is interspersed with "*jawohls,*" the "o" being pronounced long or short, to express every variety of idea and sensation.

The Baron and Baroness turned on their heels swiftly, and fairly ran away from me. Some of the passers-by be-

gan talking about it, others stared at me in astonishment. But of course I don't remember it all very clearly.

I turned and went back to Paulina Alexandrovna at an ordinary walking pace. But before I had got within a hundred steps of her bench I saw her rise and go back towards the hotel with the children.

I caught her up at the entrance.

"There! I did it..." I said.

"Very well! Now undo it!" she replied, not so much as glancing at me, and began going upstairs.

I walked about the whole evening. I went through the park and then through the woods and found myself in quite another county. I ate an omelette and drank wine in a hut—this idyllic repast cost me precisely one and a half thalers.

It was eleven by the time I got home. The General sent for me immediately.

Our party had two suites in the hotel, of two rooms each. The first was a big drawing-room with a grand piano in it, with another big room opening out of it—the General's sitting-room. It was here that he waited for me, standing in the middle of the room in an extremely majestic pose. De Grie was lolling on the sofa.

"Allow me to ask you what you have been doing, my dear sir?" began the General, addressing me.

"I wish you'd come straight to the point, General," I said. "You probably wish to ask me about my meeting with a certain German today?"

"A certain German! That German, sir, is Baron Wurmerhelm and a most important person. You were very rude to him and the Baroness."

"Not in the least."

"You frightened them, my dear sir!" shouted the General.

"Nothing of the sort. While I was in Berlin, I was struck by the way they say '*jawohl*' every few words, and

their beastly habit of drawling it. When I met him in the avenue I suddenly remembered that '*jawohl!*' why, I don't know, and, well, it got on my nerves. Besides, whenever the Baroness meets me—it has happened three times—she is in the habit of walking straight on as if I were some worm to be trodden underfoot. You will agree that I also have my pride. I took off my hat and courteously (courteously, I assure you) said: '*Madame, j'ai l'honneur d'être votre esclave.*' When the Baron turned round and shouted '*hey!*' I just couldn't help shouting back: '*Jawohl!*' I said it twice: the first time normally, and the second time I drawled it with all my might. That's all."

I admit I was delighted with this extremely puerile explanation. I had an extraordinary desire to make the whole thing sound as ridiculous as possible.

And I had quite warmed up to the subject as I went on.

"Are you laughing at me?" shouted the General. He turned to the Frenchman and explained to him in French that I was simply trying to provoke a scandal. De Grief laughed scornfully and shrugged his shoulders.

"You mustn't think that!" I cried. "It was nothing of the sort! My action was of course abominable and I admit it to you with the utmost frankness. It might be described as rude, as stupid skylarking, nothing more. And I assure you, General, I regret it exceedingly. But there is one circumstance which I consider almost excuses me even from regretting it. For the last two, perhaps three, weeks, I have been feeling far from well—sick, nervous, irritable, full of fantasies, sometimes quite losing my self-control. I have even felt an impulse now and then to speak to the Marquis and—but why should I go on, perhaps, he wouldn't like it. In a word, these are all morbid symptoms. I do not know whether the Baroness Wurmerhelm will take this fact into consideration when I go to beg her pardon (for I intend to beg her pardon). I don't suppose she will, the more that, as far as I am aware,

this circumstance has of late been abused in the legal world. During criminal trials lawyers have taken to justifying their clients, the criminals, with increasing frequency, by pleading that they had not known what they were doing at the moment of the crime, and that this is some sort of disease. 'He committed murder, you see, without knowing what he was doing.' And just fancy, General, medicine is supporting them, actually declaring that there is such a disease, a kind of temporary madness, when a man hardly knows, or only half knows, or a quarter knows what he is about. But the Baron and Baroness belong to the old generation, and, moreover, come of a line of Prussian junkers and landed proprietors. They probably know nothing about this progress in legal medicine, and so they will not accept my plea. What do you think, General?"

"That will do, sir!" said the General harshly, with suppressed fury. "That will do! I intend once and for all to get rid of you and your skylarking. You will not apologize to the Baron and Baroness. All contact with you, even if it consisted in nothing but an apology, would be humiliating to them. The Baron, on learning that you belong to my household, spoke to me at the Kursaal, and I assure you he was on the point of demanding satisfaction from me. You see to what you have subjected me—me, my dear sir! I—I—was compelled to ask the Baron's pardon and give him my word that immediately, this very day, you would no longer belong to my household."

"Wait a minute, General, wait a minute—was it he who demanded that I should no longer belong to your household, as you put it?"

"No, but I considered myself bound to give him this satisfaction and naturally the Baron was pleased. We must part, my dear sir, you are entitled to receive from me four friedrichsdors and three florins, according to the rate of exchange. Here is the money and here is the ac-

count—you can verify it. Good-bye! From this moment we are strangers. I have never had anything but trouble and unpleasantness with you. I will call the waiter at once and tell him that from tomorrow on I am not responsible for your expenses in the hotel. At your service, sir!”

I took the money and a piece of paper on which the account was written in pencil, bowed to the General, and said to him very gravely:

“Things cannot end like this, General! I am very sorry you have been subjected to unpleasantness from the Baron, but—forgive me—you have only yourself to blame. What made you undertake to answer for me to the Baron? What does the expression that I belong to your household signify? I am simply a teacher in your house and nothing more. I am not your son, nor your ward, and you cannot answer for my actions. I am a legally competent person. I am twenty-five, a university graduate, a gentleman, I am a complete stranger to you. Nothing but my boundless respect for your rank prevents me from immediately demanding satisfaction from you, and an explanation for your taking it upon yourself to answer for me.”

The General was so dumbfounded that he could only fling out his arms helplessly. Then he turned to the Frenchman and hastily explained to him that I had practically called him out. The Frenchman laughed loudly.

“But I do not intend to let the Baron off,” I continued with perfect coolness, not in the least disconcerted by the Marquis’s laughter—“and since you, General, in agreeing today to listen to the Baron’s complaints and ranging yourself on his side, have thus made yourself a participator in the affair, I have the honour to inform you that, not later than tomorrow morning, I shall demand of the Baron in my own person, a formal explanation of his reasons for appealing over my head to a third party, as if I were unable or unworthy to answer for myself.”

Things turned out just as I had foreseen. The General, on hearing this new folly, was seized with terror.

"What—do you really intend to go on with this accursed affair?" he cried. "You don't know what you're doing to me! Don't you dare, don't you dare, my dear sir, or, I swear to you—there are authorities here, too, and I—I—in a word—considering my rank, and the Baron's—in a word, you will be arrested and sent away by the police to prevent you from causing any more trouble. Remember that!" Though he was fairly choking with rage, I could see that he was still simply terrified.

"General," I replied with a calmness that he found hard to bear, "no one can be arrested for rioting before the rioting has been committed. I have not yet begun my explanations to the Baron and you can have no idea how and on what grounds I intend to take up this matter. I wish only to elucidate what is for me an insulting supposition—that I am under the guardianship of one who claims power over my freedom. There is really no need for you to be upset."

"For God's sake, for God's sake, Alexei Ivanich, give up those crazy intentions!" lisped the General, suddenly exchanging his wrathful tone for one of entreaty, and actually seizing my hands. "Just ask yourself what would come of it? More unpleasantness! You must agree that in my situation I have to be extremely particular, especially here . . . oh, you do not know, you do not know how I am situated! I am ready to take you back when we go away from here. It's only temporary—in a word, you can understand the reasons!" he cried desperately. "Alexei Ivanich, Alexei Ivanich!"

I retreated towards the door, once more begging him earnestly not to worry, and promising that all would be well, all the decencies would be observed, and hastened out of the room.

Russians abroad are sometimes too self-conscious, afraid of what people will say, and think of them, and whether this or that is the right thing to do. In a word, they watch their step continually, especially those who consider themselves people of importance. What they like best of all is some long-established convention which they can observe slavishly—in hotels, during excursions, at assemblies, on journeys. . . . The General had let slip, however, that, in addition to all this, his situation was such, that he had to be “extremely careful.” That is why he took fright so suddenly and pusillanimously and changed his tone with me. I took note of this and bore it in mind. I knew he was capable in his folly of addressing some authority the next day, and that I would really have to be careful.

As a matter of fact I had not the slightest desire to tease the General; what I now wanted was to tease Paulina. Paulina had treated me so cruelly in urging me to such foolish courses, that I was determined to drive her to the point of asking me to stop, herself. After all, my skylarking might end by compromising her, too. Moreover, I had begun to be aware of certain other sensations and desires springing up within me. The fact that I voluntarily sank into utter insignificance before her, by no means implied that I would let others treat me as an abject nonentity, and I certainly was not going to allow the Baron to give me a thrashing. I was seized with the desire to make them all look fools and emerge a hero myself. I had no need to worry! The fear of public disgrace would be sure to make her call me back, and even if she didn't she would see that I was no mere nonentity.

(Extraordinary news: I have just heard from our nurse, who met me on the stairs, that Marya Filippovna went all by herself to Karlsbad today, by the evening train, to see her cousin. What does it mean? The nurse says she has long intended to go, but how is it nobody knew about

it? But perhaps I was the only one who didn't. The nurse let slip that Marya Filippovna and the General had words the day before yesterday. I see. About Mademoiselle Blanche, no doubt. Yes, something decisive is going to happen.)

CHAPTER VII

I called the waiter this morning and told him to send the bill for my room to me personally from now on. The room was not so expensive as to necessitate my leaving the hotel. I had sixteen friedrichsdors and, and—perhaps riches awaited me. Strange—though I have won nothing as yet, all my actions, emotions, and thoughts are those of a rich man, and I cannot see myself in any other light.

Just as I had made up my mind, despite the earliness of the hour, to go at once to Mr. Astley in the Hotel d'Angleterre, which is not far from our hotel, de Grie walked into my room. This had never before happened, and besides, this gentleman and I had of late maintained the most distant, not to say strained relations. He does not even try to conceal his contempt for me, in fact he does his best to show it. And I—I have reasons of my own for not being overfond of him. In a word, I detest him. His arrival astonished me greatly. I immediately guessed that something very special was in the offing.

He came in very politely and paid me a compliment about my room. Seeing me with my hat in my hand, he expressed astonishment that I was going out for a walk so early. When he heard I was going to Mr. Astley on business, he seemed to reflect and his face expressed great concern.

De Grie, like all Frenchmen, was gay and courteous when this was necessary and advantageous, and intolerably dull when there was no need to be gay and cour-

teous. The French are seldom polite by nature; their politeness always seems to be made to order, based on calculations. If, for instance, a Frenchman sees fit to be fantastic, original, eccentric, his fantasy, which is extremely stupid and unnatural, will follow accepted and conventional lines. The Frenchman *au naturel* is made up of the most limited, petty, commonplace virtues—he is in a word the dullest creature in the world. Only the inexperienced—Russian young ladies in particular—are ever taken in by a Frenchman. Any intelligent person will at once see through and find intolerable this official rigour of established forms of drawing-room politeness, familiarity and gaiety.

"I have come to you on business," he began airily, but at the same time perfectly politely, "and I will not conceal that I have come as an envoy, or better a mediator from the General. I know very little Russian, and scarcely understood a word you said yesterday; but the General explained it to me in detail and I confess—"

"Come now, Monsieur de Grie," I interrupted, "you say you are acting as a mediator in this affair. Of course, I'm only *un outchitel* and have never claimed the honour of being a friend of this family, or of being on a particularly intimate footing here, and so I do not know all the circumstances. But kindly enlighten me: have you really become quite one of them? For you appear to participate in everything now, and are an invariable mediator in all their affairs."

He did not like my question. It was too transparent for him, and he had no intention of showing his hand.

"I am allied to the General, partly by business, partly owing to certain *special circumstances*," he said coldly. "The General has sent me to ask you to give up the intentions declared by you yesterday. All this is, of course, very amusing, but he particularly asked me to put it to you that you will not succeed. The Baron will not receive

you and anyhow he has every means, you know, for preventing any further unpleasantness on your part. You must see this for yourself. Why go on? Tell me that. The General promises faithfully to take you back into his household at the first convenient opportunity, and till then to continue your salary, *vos appointements*. That's quite advantageous, isn't it?"

I told him calmly that he was somewhat mistaken. That, far from being driven out by the Baron, I might, on the contrary, be given a hearing, and I begged him to acknowledge that he had probably come for the purpose of discovering exactly how I intended to handle this matter.

"*Mon dieu!* Since the General is so deeply interested, he must of course desire to know how you intend to proceed. That is only natural!"

I embarked upon an explanation, and he settled down to listen, lounging on the sofa, his head slightly on one side, a shade of unconcealed irony in his expression. His attitude was one of the utmost condescension. I tried with all my might to pretend that I regarded the affair in the most serious light. I explained that by complaining to the General about me, as if I were the General's servant, the Baron had in the first place deprived me of my post, and in the second place implied that I was unable to answer for myself, and was not worth speaking to. Naturally, I felt justifiably offended. Taking into consideration, however, the difference in age, social position, and so on and so on (here I could hardly suppress my laughter), I did not wish to perpetrate another folly, that is to say to demand outright satisfaction from the Baron or even to propose it to him. Nonetheless I considered myself perfectly entitled to proffer him, and still more the Baroness, my apologies, the more that of late I had felt very unwell, upset and as it were fantastic, and so on and so on. The Baron, however, had by yesterday's application to the General, so

offensive to myself, and by his insistence on the General's dismissing me, placed me in such a position that I could no longer offer my apologies to him and the Baroness, since probably the two of them, indeed the whole world, would think I was doing so under constraint, in the hope of getting back my post. From all this it follows that I am now forced to ask the Baron to apologize to me first, in the most moderate terms of course—for instance, he might say that he had meant no offence to me. After the Baron did this, my hands would be freed and I could offer him my hearty, sincere apologies. "In a word," I concluded, "I only ask the Baron to free my hands."

"Fie, how punctilious and fine we are! And why should you apologize? You will admit, Monsieur, that you started all this simply for the purpose of annoying the General. Or perhaps you have some purpose of your own. . . . *Mon cher monsieur—pardon, j'ai oublié votre nom, Monsieur Alexis?—n'est-ce pas?*"

"Excuse me, *mon cher Marquis*, but what business is it of yours?"

"*Mais le Général—*"

"And what has it to do with the General? He said something yesterday about having to be extremely particular . . . and he seemed very nervous . . . but I have no idea what it was all about."

"Why, you know, there is a certain circumstance," put in de Grie in a voice of entreaty beneath which irritation made itself more and more felt. "You know Mademoiselle de Cominges, don't you?"

"You mean, Mademoiselle Blanche?"

"Very well, then, Mademoiselle Blanche de Cominges—*et Madame sa mère*—you will agree that the General—in a word the General is in love and—and—it may even lead to a marriage. And consider the inconvenience, in that case, of all sorts of scandals, public disgrace—"

"I see here neither scandal nor public disgrace which has anything to do with this wedding."

"But *le Baron est si irascible, un caractère prussien, vous savez, enfin il fera une querelle d'Allemand.*"

"But it will concern me, not you, for you see I no longer belong to the household." (I tried to make myself sound as stupid as possible.) "But excuse me—is it quite settled that Mademoiselle Blanche will marry the General? What are they waiting for? I mean, why should it be concealed from us, from the family, at least?"

"I am unable—as a matter of fact, it's not quite settled yet—however, you know they are expecting news from Russia; the General has to put his affairs in order—"

"Ah, yes—*la baboulinka!*"

De Grie looked at me with hatred in his eyes.

"In a word," he interrupted, "I count on your native courtesy, your intelligence, your tact—you will of course do this for a family in which you have been received like one of themselves, and treated with love and respect. . . ."

"Come now—I have been given the sack. You say that this is merely for the sake of appearances, but you will agree that when people say to you: 'I don't want to tweak your ears, you know, but just for the sake of appearances, kindly allow me to do so'. . . it comes to almost the same thing, doesn't it?"

"In that case—since no requests carry any weight with you—" he began with stiff arrogance, "allow me to assure you that measures will be taken. There are authorities here, and you will be sent away this very day—*que diable!* *Un blanc-bec comme vous* wants to call out a person like the Baron! And you think you will be left in peace, do you? Believe me, no one is afraid of you here! If I put a request to you, it was chiefly on my own initiative, for you have annoyed the General. Is it possible you don't understand that the Baron will simply tell his footman to drive you away?"

"Oh, I shan't go to him myself," I answered with extreme calm. "You are mistaken, Monsieur de Grie—everything will be done a great deal more correctly than you seem to think. I am going immediately to Mr. Astley, to ask him to be my arbiter, in a word, my second. He likes me and will hardly refuse. He will go to the Baron, and the Baron will receive him. I may be only '*un outchitel*,' and in some ways a subordinate, well, anyhow, defenceless, but Mr. Astley is the nephew of a lord, a real lord, everyone knows that—Lord Peabrock, and this lord is here himself. Believe me, the Baron will be very polite to Mr. Astley and hear what he has to say. If he doesn't, then Mr. Astley will take it as a personal affront (you know how determined the English are) and send a friend of his to the Baron, and he has some very respectable friends. Consider all this, and you will see that things may turn out rather differently from your expectations."

The Frenchman took fright in good earnest. All this rang true, and it appeared I really was in a position to make trouble.

"I beg you," he said, and this time his voice was frankly imploring, "to give it all up! You seem to enjoy the idea of a row. It's not satisfaction you are seeking, but a scandal. As I said before all this may be very amusing and even clever—which is perhaps what you want. But—in a word," he concluded, seeing that I had risen and picked up my hat, "I have come to hand you a few lines from a certain person. Read them, please, I am instructed to wait for your answer."

With this he handed me a small piece of paper folded in two and fastened with a wafer.

"The contents, in Paulina's writing, were as follows:

"You seem to intend going on with this affair. You are peeved and have begun your schoolboy tricks. But there are certain circumstances involved which I may perhaps later explain to you. So please stop and calm yourself.

What nonsense it all is! I need you and you yourself promised to obey me. Remember Schlangenberg! I beg you, if necessary I order you, to obey me! Your P.

"P. S. Perhaps you are angry with me about yesterday—if so, please forgive me."

My head seemed to be going round as I read these lines. My lips turned white, and I began to shiver. The accursed Frenchman looked before him with an air of intense discretion, and then averted his eyes from me as if not wishing to witness my confusion. I would rather he had laughed at me outright.

"Good," I replied. "Tell Mademoiselle not to worry. But allow me to ask you," I added harshly, "why you didn't give me the note before. Instead of chattering about trifles it seems to me you should have begun with this—if the real reason for coming to me was this errand—"

"Oh, I wanted—the whole thing's so very extraordinary, you know, that you will excuse my natural impatience. I wanted to learn for myself, as soon as possible, from your own lips, what your intentions were. Moreover, I have no idea what is in this note, and thought it would never be too late to give it to you."

"I see—you were bidden to give it me only in case of need, and not to do so if you could manage everything by talking. That's it, isn't it? Come Monsieur de Grie, give me a straight answer!"

"*Peut-être*," he said, assuming an air of extreme reserve and looking strangely at me.

I took up my hat. He nodded and went out. I thought I caught a mocking smile on his lips. And how could it be otherwise?

"You and I will have it out one day, Frenchie, we will see which is the better man!" I muttered as I went downstairs.

I could not yet marshal my thoughts, the blood rushed to my head. The air revived me slightly.

Two ideas presented themselves vividly to my mind as soon as I was able to think clearly. The *first*, that it was strange that such trifles, a little skylarking, ridiculous threats from a lad, casually uttered the day before, should have resulted in such a *universal* panic, and the *second*—what an influence this Frenchie must have on Paulina! A word from him, and she does whatever he asks her, writes me a note and actually begs a favour of me. Of course their relations have been a mystery to me from the very first, ever since I began to know them. But during the last few days I have noticed in her a thorough disgust and even scorn for him, and he never so much as looks at her, almost fails in common politeness to her. I have noticed this. Paulina herself had spoken to me of this disgust—most significant admissions had escaped her—it means he must have a hold on her, that she is in some sort of subjection to him.

CHAPTER VIII

In the promenade as they call it here, that is to say in the chestnut avenue, I met my Englishman.

"Oh, oh!" he cried, catching sight of me. "I was going to you, and you were coming to me. Have you really broken off with the family?"

"First tell me how it is that you know all about it?" I asked him in astonishment. "Does everyone?"

"Oh, no, not everyone, and everybody ought not to. No one speaks about it."

"How do you know, then?"

"I know, I mean I happened to hear of it. Where will you go now? I like you and I was coming to see you."

"You're a fine fellow, Mr. Astley!" said I (but I was really struck—how did he know?). "And as I have not had my coffee yet and I don't suppose you have had it

properly, let's go to the Kursaal and have a smoke and I'll tell you everything. . . . and then you can tell me, too."

The café was quite near. We sat down at a table and the waiter brought us coffee. I lit a cigarette, but Mr. Astley did not smoke and, fixing his eyes on me, prepared to listen.

"I'm not going anywhere, I shall stay here," I began.

"I knew you would," said Mr. Astley, approvingly.

I had not intended, in going to see Mr. Astley, to speak to him of my love for Paulina. I had even been fully determined not to do so. All these days I had scarcely said a word to him about it. Besides he was such a bashful creature himself. I had seen at once that Paulina had produced an extraordinary impression on him, but he never so much as mentioned her name. And yet, the moment he sat down and fixed his steady, leaden gaze on my face, I suddenly felt an inexplicable desire to tell him all, that is to say, all my love in all its subtleties. I spoke for half an hour uninterruptedly, and I enjoyed it very much, it was the first time I had talked about it. And when I observed that at certain very passionate places in my narrative he seemed embarrassed, I purposely became still more passionate. Only one thing I regret—perhaps I said too much about the Frenchman.

Mr. Astley listened to me, sitting motionless opposite me without uttering a word or a sound, and looking straight into my eyes. But when I mentioned the Frenchman, he suddenly checked me, and asked me severely what right I had to mention this irrelevant circumstance. Mr. Astley was always putting the strangest questions.

"None whatever, I'm afraid," I replied.

"Can you say anything definite about this Marquis and Miss Paulina—anything beyond mere suppositions?"

Again I was astonished at this point-blank question from a man so shy as Mr. Astley.

"No, nothing definite," I replied, "nothing, of course."

"In that case you are wrong, not merely to speak to me about it, but even to think about it yourself."

"All right, all right, I admit it! But that's not the point now," I interrupted, keeping my astonishment to myself. Here I told him about yesterday's incident in all its details—Paulina's whim, my adventure with the Baron, my dismissal, the General's extraordinary pusillanimity and ended up by giving him a detailed account of de Grie's morning visit, going into all the fine shades, showing him Paulina's note.

"What do you make of it all?" I asked. "I was coming to see you for the express purpose of hearing your opinion. As for myself, I could kill that Frenchie, and perhaps I will one day."

"So could I," said Mr. Astley. "As far as Miss Paulina is concerned, you know, people sometimes are forced to enter into relations even with people they hate, if necessity requires this of them. There may be relations you know nothing of, depending on outside circumstances. I think you may calm yourself—to a certain extent, of course. As for what she did yesterday, it certainly was very strange—not because she wanted to get rid of you and sent you to encounter the Baron's stick, which I can't see why, since he had it in his hands, he did not use, but because such a whim on the part of such a—such a fine young lady—is highly improper. Of course she could never have guessed you would carry out her jesting command so literally—"

"Look here!" I cried, gazing steadily at Mr. Astley. "I have a feeling that you have already heard all this, and d'you know from whom? From Miss Paulina herself."

Mr. Astley looked at me in surprise.

"Your eyes gleam, and I read suspicion in them," he said, immediately recovering his former composure. "But you have no right whatever to show your suspicions. I

cannot admit your right and absolutely refuse to answer your question."

"Never mind! Never mind! I don't care!" I cried, strangely moved, wondering how such an idea had come into my head, and when, where, and how Mr. Astley could have been chosen by Paulina as a confidant. But then, of late, I had lost sight of Mr. Astley, and Paulina had always been an enigma to me, so much so that, for instance now, in relating to Mr. Astley the tale of my love, I was suddenly, in the middle of my narrative, struck by the fact that I had practically nothing precise and definite to say about my relations with her. On the contrary, everything was fantastic, strange, vague, and like nothing on earth.

"Very well. I seem to be in a muddle—there are many things I can't get straight in my mind just now," I replied, almost panting, "but you're a good fellow. Now there's something else; I want, not your advice, but your opinion about."

After a pause I continued:

"What do you think—what made the General take fright? Why do they all make such a fuss about my silly skylarking? Such a fuss, that de Grie himself saw fit to intervene (and he only intervenes in the most extreme cases) and even came to see me, implored, begged me—de Grie begged me! Finally, observe, he came at nine o'clock, just before nine, and Miss Paulina's note was already in his hands. When was it written, I ask? Can it be that Miss Paulina was waked for this purpose? Apart from the fact that it proves that Miss Paulina is his slave (for she actually asks my pardon!); apart from that—what is all this to her, to her personally? Why does *she* take such an interest in it? Why should they be afraid of some Baron? And what has it to do with the General marrying Mademoiselle Blanche de Cominges? They say he has to be *particular* owing to this circumstance—but this is really being a trifle too particular, you will admit.

What have you to say to it? I see by your eyes that about this, too, you know more than I do!"

Mr. Astley smiled and nodded.

"I really do seem to know rather more than you about it," he said, "it all hinges around Mademoiselle Blanche, that's the truth, I'm sure."

"Well, and what about Mademoiselle Blanche?" I cried impatiently. (I was suddenly visited by a hope that something would now be divulged about Mademoiselle Paulina.)

"It seems to me that Mademoiselle Blanche is at present particularly anxious to avoid a meeting with the Baron and Baroness, especially an unpleasant one, or, what would be still worse, a fracas."

"Go on, go on!"

"Mademoiselle Blanche was in Roulettenburg the year before last, during the season—I was here, too. Mademoiselle Blanche was not then called Mademoiselle de Cominges, and her mother, Madame Veuve Cominges, did not then exist, either. At any rate nobody ever heard of her. There wasn't any de Grie, either. It is my profound conviction that not only is there no relationship between them, but that they have only known each other quite a short time. And de Grie has only been a marquis a very short time—a certain circumstance makes me sure of that. I would even risk the suggestion that he has only been called de Grie for a short time. I know a man here who had met him under another name."

"But he really has a very imposing circle of acquaintances, hasn't he?"

"Oh, that's quite possible. Even Mademoiselle Blanche may have that. But the year before last Mademoiselle Blanche, on the complaint of that very Baroness, received an invitation from the local police to leave the town, and did leave it."

"How was that?"

"She turned up here for the first time with a certain Italian, a prince with an illustrious name, Barberini or something like that. A man smothered in rings and diamonds which were actually genuine. They drove out in a wonderful carriage. Mademoiselle Blanche at first had very good luck at *trente et quarante*, but later her luck went back on her. As far as I can remember at least. I recall her losing a remarkable sum in one evening. But worst of all, *un beau matin* her prince disappeared no one knows where. The horses and carriage disappeared, too, everything disappeared. The hotel bill was appalling. Mademoiselle Zelma (she suddenly changed from Barberini to Mademoiselle Zelma) was in the last stages of despair. Her shrieks and howls could be heard all over the hotel, and she tore her dress to shreds in her fury. At that time there was a certain Polish count (all travelling Poles are counts) in the hotel, and Mademoiselle Zelma, tearing at her dress and scratching her face with her beautiful perfumed fingers, produced a certain impression on him. They came to an understanding and by dinner-time she was consoled. That evening he appeared with her on his arm at the Kursaal. Mademoiselle Zelma laughed very loudly as usual and there was an added shade of assurance in her manners. She immediately joined the ranks of those roulette-playing ladies who, going up to the table, shoulder a player away with all their might to clear themselves a place. This is regarded extremely chic among such ladies. You must have noticed them."

"Oh, yes."

"They're not worthy of notice. To the annoyance of the decent public the place swarms with them, or at any rate those of them who change thousand-franc notes at the table every day. Naturally, as soon as they stop changing notes they are requested to leave. Mademoiselle Zelma went on changing notes, but her luck grew still worse. These ladies very often have extraordinary luck, you

know. And their self-control is remarkable. But that's not the end of my story. One day the count disappeared, just as the prince had. Mademoiselle Zelma appeared at the gaming tables all alone that evening. This time no one came forward to offer her his arm. In two days she lost everything. Staking her last louis d'or and losing it she looked round and saw at her side Baron Wurmerhelm, fixing an attentive and indignant gaze upon her. But Mademoiselle Zelma, taking no notice of his indignation, turned to the Baron with a significant smile and asked him to put ten louis d'ors on the red for her. After this, on the Baroness's lodging a complaint, she received an invitation that evening not to appear in the Kursaal any more. If you wonder how I know all these petty and highly improper details I can tell you that I had them from Mr. Feeder, a relative of mine, who that same evening drove Mademoiselle Zelma from Roulettenburg to Spa in his carriage. Now get this clear—Mademoiselle Blanche wishes to be the General's lady, no doubt to avert the possibility of receiving such invitations in the future as she received the year before last from the Kursaal police. She doesn't gamble any more now, probably because by all the signs, she has a hoard from which she lends money to gamblers at interest. This is much more profitable. I even suspect that the unfortunate General himself is in her debt. Perhaps de Grie is too. Perhaps de Grie is hand in glove with her. You will agree that, at least until the wedding, she would not wish to attract the attention of the Baron and Baroness in any way. In a word, in her present position, a scandal is the last thing she wants. You are connected with the family and your action might cause a scandal, the more that she appears in public every day on the General's or Miss Paulina's arm. Now do you understand?"

"No, I don't!" I cried, banging on the table so violently that the garçon ran up in a fright.

"Tell me, Mr. Astley," I repeated, almost beside myself with rage, "since you already knew this whole story, and consequently know very well who this Mademoiselle Blanche de Cominges is, why did you not warn me, or for that matter the General himself and last but not least Miss Paulina, who has been seen at the Kursaal arm-in-arm with Mademoiselle Blanche? How could you stand it?"

"It would have been no good warning you, because there was nothing you could have done," replied Mr. Astley, calmly. "And then what was there to say? The General, probably, knows a great deal more about Mademoiselle Blanche than I do, and nevertheless he appears in public with her and Miss Paulina. The General is an unfortunate man. Yesterday I watched Mademoiselle Blanche galloping on a fine horse accompanied by Monsieur de Grie and that Russian princeling, and the General galloping after them on a chestnut horse. The next morning, though his seat was excellent, he complained that his legs hurt. And the idea suddenly occurred to me that he was a lost soul, but of course it's all none of my business and I have only had the honour of Miss Paulina's acquaintance for quite a short time. But (Mr. Astley suddenly checked himself) I have already told you that I cannot admit your right to put certain questions, sincere as my affection for you is—"

"That'll do!" I said, getting up. "It is now perfectly clear to me that Miss Paulina, too, knows all about Mademoiselle Blanche, but that she cannot bear to part with her Frenchman and that is why she can bring herself to go out for walks with Mademoiselle Blanche. Believe me, no other reason would have made her go out with Mademoiselle Blanche and send me a note begging me to leave the Baron alone. Yes, it is this which outweighs all other considerations. And yet, after all, it was she who egged me on to address the Baron. Deuce take it, what is one to make of it?"

"You forget in the first place that this Mademoiselle Blanche is the General's fiancée, and in the second place that Miss Paulina, the General's stepdaughter, has a little brother and sister, the General's own children, whom this madman utterly neglects, and has, I think, robbed into the bargain."

"Yes, yes, that's it! To leave the children would mean to abandon them altogether, whereas by staying here she can look after their interests, and perhaps save some fragment of the estate. Yes, yes, that's all true! And yet! And yet! Oh, now I understand why they are all so much interested in *la baboulinka*!"

"In whom?" asked Mr. Astley.

"In that old witch in Moscow who refuses to die, though they are all daily expecting a telegram announcing her death."

"Oh, yes, of course, all their thoughts are now concentrated on her. Everything hangs on her will. If the General turns out to be the heir, he will marry. Miss Paulina, too, will have her hands freed, and de Grie—"

"Well, and de Grie—?"

"And de Grie will get his money. That's all that keeps him here."

"You think so—you think that's all he's waiting for?"

"I know of nothing else," said Mr. Astley, closing his lips resolutely.

"But I do! I do!" I repeated furiously. "He, too, is expecting a legacy, for Paulina will get a dowry, and the moment she gets the money she will rush into his arms. All women are the same. The proudest of them turn out to be nothing but abject slaves of the most common description. Paulina is capable of passionate love, and nothing else. That is my opinion of her! Watch her, especially when she is alone, lost in thought. She seems to be doomed, condemned, accursed! She is capable of every possible outrage and passion—she—she—but who is call-

ing me?" I suddenly cried. "Who's shouting? I heard somebody shouting in Russian: Alexei Ivanich! It's a woman's voice—listen!"

By now we were approaching the hotel. We had left the café behind us long ago, without having noticed it.

"I heard a woman shouting, but I don't know who she's calling, it's in Russian. Now I see where the shouts are coming from," indicated Mr. Astley. "It's that woman in the big armchair who has just been carried into the porch by a crowd of footmen. Behind her they are bringing up trunks—the train must just have arrived."

"But why should she be calling me? There she goes again—look, she's waving to us."

"I see she is," said Mr. Astley.

"Alexei Ivanich! Alexei Ivanich! Good heavens, what an oaf!" came frantically from the porch of the hotel.

We almost ran up to the entrance. As I stepped on to the drive, I was half stunned by my astonishment, and could hardly move.

CHAPTER IX

Ensnconced on the wide porch of the hotel, to which she had been borne up the steps in an armchair, surrounded by her maid and footmen and a host of obsequious hotel servants, including the ober-kellner himself, come out expressly to welcome the illustrious visitor, whose arrival, with her own servants and such quantities of boxes and trunks, had been so noisy and impressive, was—Babushka herself! Yes, Babushka herself, the rich, formidable, seventy-five-year-old Antonida Vasilyevna Tarasevicheva, landed proprietress and Moscow *grande dame*, *la baboulinka*, regarding whom telegrams had been dispatched and received, she who was dying and did not die, and who suddenly appeared before us in person, like a bolt

from the blue. She no longer had the use of her legs and had been carried here in a chair (she had been carried everywhere for the last five years), as usual, brisk, perky, complacent, sitting bolt upright, shouting loudly and imperiously, scolding everyone—exactly as I had had the honour of seeing her two or three times since I had been appointed tutor in the General's household. No wonder I stood transfixed in astonishment before her. She had seen me with her lynx eyes in the distance, while being borne along in her chair, had recognized me, and called me by my name and patronymic—which, as she invariably did, she had memorized once and for all. "And this is the woman they expected to see lying in her coffin, buried, leaving her heritage behind her!" passed through my mind. "Why, she'll survive us all, she'll survive everyone in the hotel! But good heavens, what will become of the family now, what will the General do? She'll turn the whole hotel upside down!"

"What d'you mean by standing there and glaring at me, sir?" went on Babushka, still shouting. "Have you forgotten how to bow, how to greet a body? Have you grown proud? Or is it that you don't recognize me? D'you hear, Potapich," she said, turning to her butler, a grey-haired ancient in a frock-coat and white tie, with a rosily gleaming bald head, who had accompanied her on her journey. "D'you hear—he doesn't recognize me! They've buried me! They sent telegram after telegram—is she dead or is she not? I know everything, I do! And here I am, you see, very much alive."

"Come now, Antonida Vasilyevna," I said cheerfully, recovering my senses. "Why should I wish you ill? It's only I was so surprised . . . how could I help it, it's so unexpected—"

"And what is there so surprising about it? I just got into the train and came. It was quite comfortable in the

railway carriage, not a bit bumpy. Were you taking a walk?"

"Yes, I've been to the Kursaal."

"I like it here," said Babushka, looking round. "It's warm and the trees are splendid. It's just what I like! Are our folk at home? Is the General in?"

"Oh, yes—they're sure to be at home at this hour, all of them."

"Do they keep special hours, and go in for ceremony here? Leaders of fashion! Keep a carriage, I hear, *les seigneurs Russes*! Spent all his money, so he has to go abroad! And is Praskovya with him?"

"Paulina Alexandrovna's here, too."

"And the Frenchie? Oh, well, I'll soon see for myself. Show me the way, take me straight to the General. How do you like it here, yourself?"

"So-so."

"And you, Potapich, tell that oaf of a waiter to get me a convenient suite, a nice one, not too high up, and have everything taken there. Why are they all jostling to carry my chair? What's the matter with them? The slaves! Who's that with you?" she said addressing me again.

"That's Mr. Astley."

"Never heard of him—who is he?"

"A traveller, a friend of mine. He knows the General."

"An Englishman. That's why he stares at me with his teeth clenched. I like the English. Come on, take me upstairs, straight to their suite! Where do they live?"

Babushka was borne up the wide hotel staircase. I went in front. We made a striking procession. Everyone who happened to meet us stopped and stared in astonishment. Our hotel is considered the best, the most expensive, and the most aristocratic in the place. Fine ladies and stately English visitors are constantly to be met with on the stairs and in the passages. Many people made inquiries of the head waiter, who was equally astonished. Of

course he told all inquirers that it was an important foreign lady, *une Russe, une comtesse, une grande dame* and that she had taken the suite which, a week before, had been occupied by *la grande duchesse de N.* Babushka's imperious appearance as she was borne along in her chair caused a tremendous impression. Each time anyone new came towards her she measured him with an inquisitive glance and asked me loudly who it was.

Babushka came of a mighty breed, and though she never left her chair, everyone who saw her felt that she must be very tall. Her back was as straight as a board, and she never leaned against the cushions. She held her large grey head high and her face with its harsh prominent features was exposed to view. Her gaze was at once arrogant and defiant. Anyone could see that her looks and gestures were perfectly natural. Despite her seventy-five years she had a fresh complexion, and she still had most of her teeth. She wore a black silk dress and a white cap.

"I find her extraordinarily interesting," whispered Mr. Astley as he mounted the stairs beside me.

"She knows about the telegrams," I pondered, "she knows about de Grie, too, but she doesn't seem to know much about Mademoiselle Blanche, yet." I immediately communicated these thoughts to Mr. Astley.

Sinner that I am, as soon as I had got over my first astonishment, I was delighted at the thought of the thunderbolt being prepared for the General. I was quite elated, and marched ahead in the highest spirits.

The family had rooms on the third floor. I made no announcement, did not even knock at the door, but simply flung it wide open, and Babushka was borne in in triumph. They were all gathered in the General's sitting-room, as if by design. It was twelve o'clock and apparently some excursion was being discussed—some were to drive, some to go on horseback, no one was to be left behind. As well as the family, certain friends had been in-

vited. In addition to the General, Paulina, and the children, and their various nursemaids, there were in the room: de Grie, Mademoiselle Blanche, still in her riding habit, her mother Madame Veuve Cominges, the Russian princeling, and some learned German traveller, whom I had never seen there before. The chair with Babushka in it was set down in the very middle of the room, three paces from the General. Never shall I forget that moment! Just before our entrance the General had been saying something and de Grie was correcting him. It should be noted that Mademoiselle Blanche and de Grie had for some reason or other been making a great fuss of the Russian princeling during the last two or three days—*à la barbe du pauvre général*, and the prevailing tone, while somewhat artificial, was at once gay and genially domestic. At the sight of Babushka the General stopped in the middle of a sentence with his mouth open, as if turned to stone. Looking at her with bulging eyes, he seemed to be bewitched by the glance of a basilisk. Babushka stared back, silent and motionless—but what a triumphant, defiant, mocking glance that was! They eyed one another thus for ten whole seconds, while all around were plunged in profound silence. De Grie was stunned at first, but very soon an expression of extraordinary anxiety showed in his face. Mademoiselle Blanche raised her eyebrows and stared wildly at Babushka. The Russian princeling and the learned man observed the whole scene in utter bewilderment. Extreme surprise and perplexity could be seen in Paulina's glance, and she suddenly went as white as a sheet. A minute later the blood flew rapidly to her cheeks and she flushed violently. Yes, it was a catastrophe for everyone. I could only let my glance travel from Babushka to the others and back again. Mr. Astley stood apart, calm and correct as usual.

"Well, here I am! Instead of a telegram!" burst out Babushka, at last breaking the silence. "You weren't expecting me, were you?"

"Antonida Vasilyevna—Aunt ... but how?..." murmured the unfortunate General. If Babushka had waited a few more seconds before speaking I think he would have had a stroke.

"How? Got into the train, and came. What's the railway for? And you all thought I had turned up my toes and left everything to you! I know all about the telegrams you sent from here. Must have spent a tidy sum on them. Telegrams are expensive here. I just girded up my loins and here I am. Is this the Frenchman? Monsieur de Grie, isn't it?"

"*Oui, Madame,*" struck in de Grie, "*et croyez, je suis si enchanté! Votre santé—c'est un miracle—vous voir ici—une surprise charmante—*"

"Of course it's *charmante*; I know you, you mountebank, and I don't believe you that much!" She showed him the end of her little finger. "And who's this?" she said, pointing to Mademoiselle Blanche. The striking figure of the Frenchwoman in a riding habit with a crop in her hand evidently made an impression on her. "Do you belong to these parts, or what?"

"This is Mademoiselle Blanche de Cominges and this is her mamma, Madame de Cominges; they are staying in the hotel here," I informed her.

"Is the daughter married?" asked Babushka abruptly.

"Mademoiselle de Cominges is not married," I replied deferentially, speaking in tones intentionally low.

"Jolly?"

I did not at once understand the question.

"Not a bore? Understands Russian? Now de Grie, here, picked up the lingo while he was in Moscow."

I explained that Mademoiselle de Cominges had never been in Russia.

"*Bonjour!*" said Babushka abruptly, addressing Mademoiselle Blanche.

"Bonjour, Madame," Mademoiselle Blanche dropped an elegant curtsy, showing, under cover of excessive modesty and politeness, by her whole face and figure how such strange questions and manners astonished her.

"Oho! Dropping her eyes, putting on airs, playing the fine lady! I get your measure at once—some actress. I've taken rooms downstairs," she said suddenly, turning to the General. "I'll be your neighbour. Are you glad or are you not?"

"Oh, Aunt! Believe in the sincerity of my feelings—my satisfaction—" said the General eagerly. He had partially recovered from the shock and since, when necessary, he could be eloquent and dignified, he now began to hold forth. "We were so alarmed, so disturbed by the news of your indisposition—we received such hopeless telegrams and all of a sudden—"

"That's a lie!" exclaimed Babushka, interrupting him immediately.

"But how could you risk taking such a journey?" said the General, in his turn interrupting her and raising his voice as if he had not heard her. "You will admit that at your age and with your health . . . the unexpectedness of the whole thing, our astonishment is not to be wondered at. But I am so glad. . . . We shall all—" (here he gave an ecstatic smile) "I am sure we shall all do our very best to make your visit as pleasant as possible."

"That'll do. Balderdash! Talking your head off as usual. I shall manage very well. But I have no objection to your company. I was never one to bear malice. How, you ask? What's so surprising about it? Nothing could be simpler. What are they all so surprised about? Oh, Praskovya, is it you? What are you up to here?"

"How are you, Babushka!" said Paulina, going up to her. "When did you leave?"

"That's the only intelligent question I've heard yet. I'm tired of all those ohs and ahs! It was like this, you see—

I kept on and on lying in bed, the doctors kept on and on treating me, until I drove them away and called the sexton from St. Nikola's. He cured a woman of the same disease with chopped hay. Well, and it did me good, too. On the third day I began to sweat and then I got up. Then my Germans gathered round again, put on their glasses and began their gibberish; if you go abroad and take the waters now, they said, the constipation will be quite cured, and I said to myself: 'Why not?' The Dur-Zaghigins cried out at me: 'The journey will kill you!' But I took no notice. I spent a day packing, and last Friday I took a girl and Pötapich and Fyodor the footman, but I dismissed him when we reached Berlin, for I saw he was quite useless—I could have got here all by myself—I had a private railway compartment and there are porters at all the stations, they'll take you anywhere for twenty kopeks. But these are very grand rooms you've hired," she concluded, looking round her. "Where does the money come from, good sir? For all your property is mortgaged. And the money you owe to that Frenchie alone! You see I know everything, everything!"

"Aunt—I—" began the General in confusion. "I am surprised, Aunt. I think I can look after myself without anyone's supervision—and besides I live within my means and we—"

"Within your means, do you? You must have robbed your children of their last penny, guardian!"

"After this, after such words—" began the General indignantly, "I hardly know—"

"You don't know—that's just it! You probably never leave the gaming table. Have you gambled everything away?"

The General was dumbfounded, he fairly choked from the agitation surging up within him.

"At roulette? Me? A man of my distinction? Think what you are saying, Aunt, you must still be unwell."

"None of that now! I don't suppose they can pry you away from the tables. I don't believe a word you say. I shall have a look at this roulette of yours this very day. You, Praskovya, can tell me what the sights are and Alexei Ivanich here can show me round, and you, Potapich, write down all the places we have to go to—what are the sights?" she said, again addressing Paulina abruptly.

"There is a ruined castle not far off, and then there's the Schlangenberg."

"What's the Schlangenberg? A copse, or what?"

"No, not a copse, it's a hill. There's a *pointe*—"

"What's a *pointe*?"

"The highest point of the mountain, it's fenced off. There's a marvellous view from there."

"Could they drag my chair up that mountain? Could they do it, d'you think?"

"Oh, porters can be found," I replied.

Just then the nurse Fedosya came in to greet Babushka, bringing the General's children with her.

"No kissing, now! I hate kissing children. All children have running noses. Well, Fedosya, how do you like it here?"

"It's ever so nice here, Antonida Vasilyevna," replied Fedosya. "But you've been poorly they say, Ma'am! We've worried so about you!"

"I know—you're a good soul. Who are those people—all guests?" she asked, again turning to Paulina. "Who's that queer little man in spectacles?"

"Prince Nilsky, Granny," Paulina whispered in her ear.

"Oh, a Russian! And I thought he wouldn't understand! Perhaps he didn't hear. Mr. Astley I've seen. Ah, here he is again," said Babushka catching sight of him. "How d'you do!" and she suddenly turned towards him. Mr. Astley bowed to her in silence.

"Well, what have you got to tell me? Say something. Translate it for him, Paulina."

Paulina interpreted.

"I am very glad to see you, and rejoice that you are in good health," replied Mr. Astley gravely, but with perfect readiness. His words were translated to Babushka, who seemed to be pleased with them.

"The English always find the right answer," she remarked. "Somehow I've always liked Englishmen, the Frenchies can't be compared with them. Come and see me," she said again turning to Mr. Astley. "I'll try not to be a nuisance. Tell him what I said and say I live downstairs, downstairs, d'you hear me?" she repeated to Mr. Astley, pointing downwards with her finger.

Mr. Astley was delighted with the invitation.

Babushka enveloped Paulina with a keen and satisfied glance.

"I could be very fond of you, Praskovya," she said abruptly, "you're a nice lass, the best of the lot, but what a temper! Well, I've got a temper myself. Turn round—is that a switch on your head?"

"No, Babushka, it's my own hair."

"That's right. I don't like the silly fashion they have now. You're very pretty. I should fall in love with you if I were a young man. Why don't you get married? But it's time for me to go. I must have some air after all that time in the train. Well, what about you—still angry?" This to the General.

"As if I could be, Aunt!" said the delighted General hastily. "I understand that at your age—"

"*Cette vieille est tombée en enfance*," de Grie whispered in my ear.

"I want to see everything there is to be seen. Can you spare Alexei Ivanich?" said Babushka.

"Oh, as much as you like, but I myself—and Paulina, and Monsieur de Grie, we shall all, all, consider it a pleasure to accompany you—"

"*Mais, Madame, cela sera un plaisir—*" put in de Grie with a fascinating smile.

"You and your *plaisir*! You make me laugh, sir! I shan't give you any money," she added suddenly, turning to the General. "Well, I'll be off to my room. I must have a look at it, and then we'll start off for the sights. Come on now, lift me!"

Babushka was again lifted up and the whole company trooped down the stairs after the chair. The General walked as if stunned by a blow on his head from a bludgeon. De Grie was lost in thought. Mademoiselle Blanche made as if to stay behind, but thought better of it and followed the others. After her came the Russian prince, and no one was left in the General's suite but the German and Madame Veuve Cominges.

CHAPTER X

At health resorts, and for that matter everywhere on the continent, hotel managers and head waiters, in allotting rooms, are ruled not so much by the needs and wishes of their guests, as by their own summing up of them. And it must be admitted that they are seldom wrong. But Babushka was for some unknown reason given such a magnificent suite that it really looked as if they had overdone it. Four sumptuously furnished rooms with a bathroom, accommodation for servants, a separate room for her maid, and so on and so on. In these rooms a grand duchess really had lived a week ago, and of course the new visitors were informed of this, to send up the price of the suite. Babushka was borne, or rather propelled, through all the rooms and she inspected them with a keenly criti-

cal eye. The head waiter, an elderly man beginning to go bald, accompanied her deferentially during this initial survey.

I have no idea whom they took Babushka for, but they evidently thought she was some extremely important, and, above all, wealthy personage. They wrote her down in the hotel register as Madame la Générale Princesse de Tarassévitchéva, although Babushka had never had the title of princess. It was probably the fact that she travelled with her own servants, in a private compartment, with an enormous amount of bags and trunks and even chests, which gained such a reputation for Babushka. And the armchair, Babushka's harsh voice, the eccentric questions she posed, all unabashed, with the air of one who would brook no contradiction, in a word, Babushka's whole personality—her erect carriage and harsh, imperious manner—increased the universal awe in which she was held. While making her tour of the rooms she would suddenly order the chair to be stopped, pointing to some piece of furniture and addressing the most disconcerting questions to the respectfully smiling, but already somewhat nervous head waiter. Babushka put her questions in French, which, by the way, she spoke rather badly, so that I generally had to act as interpreter. Most of the head waiter's replies displeased her, and struck her as unsatisfactory. Her questions seemed to have little reference to the matter in hand, and were often quite wild. For example, she suddenly stopped the chair in front of a picture, a rather feeble copy of some well-known mythological canvas.

"Whose portrait is this?"

The head waiter replied that it was probably some countess.

"D'you mean to say you don't know? You live here and you don't know! Why is it here? Why has she slanting eyes?"

The head waiter, unable to give satisfactory replies to all these questions, was quite overcome.

"What a blockhead!" cried Babushka in Russian.

She was carried further. Much the same story was repeated before a Saxony statuette which Babushka, after gazing long at it, for some unknown reason wished to be removed. Finally, she pestered the head waiter with questions about the price of the carpets in the bedroom, and where they came from. The head waiter promised to find out.

"Imbeciles," growled Babushka and gave herself up to the contemplation of the bed.

"What a grand canopy! Draw the curtain!"

The curtain was drawn back.

"More, more! Open it right up! Take off the pillows, the pillow-cases, lift the eiderdown."

Everything was turned and re-turned. Babushka inspected the bedding minutely.

"I'm glad there are no bugs. Take away all the sheets! Spread my sheets and put down my pillows. But it's all too grand. What does an old woman like me want with such a suite? It'll be dull all by myself. Alexei Ivanich, you must come and see me often, when you've finished giving the children their lessons."

"Since yesterday I no longer work for the General," I replied. "And I live in the hotel quite on my own."

"How's that?"

"The other day a certain distinguished Baron came here with his wife, the Baroness, from Berlin, and yesterday, while out for a walk, I addressed them in German, not observing the Berlin pronunciation."

"Well, and what of it?"

"He took it amiss and complained to the General, and yesterday the General gave me the sack."

"Why—were you rude to that Baron? (It doesn't matter if you were!)"

"Oh, no! On the contrary, it was the Baron who shook his stick at me."

"And you allowed your teacher to be treated like that, you muff!" she barked at the General. "And dismissed him for it! A set of dunces, the lot of you!"

"Please don't trouble yourself, Aunt," replied the General with a shade of supercilious familiarity. "I can look after my own affairs. And Alexei Ivanich did not give you quite a true version of what happened."

"And you put up with it!" she said to me.

"I wanted to call the Baron out," I replied, trying to sound as casual and demure as I could, "but the General objected."

"Why did you object?" asked Babushka, addressing herself to the General again. ("Off with you, my good man!" she said, suddenly turning on the head waiter. "You can come when you're called. You needn't stand there gaping. I can't abide that Nuremberg phiz!") The waiter bowed and went out, without of course having understood Babushka's compliment.

"Why, Aunt, we can't have duels, can we?" replied the General, with a sour smile.

"Why not? All men are fighting cocks. Why shouldn't they have fought? You're a set of geese, I tell you. You don't know how to stand up for your country. Well, lift me! Potapich, see that there are always two porters in readiness—hire them and settle with them—two will be enough. They'll only have to carry me up the steps, they can push the chair over flat places, and along the streets. Tell them that. And mind you pay them in advance. It'll make them more respectful. And you yourself stay beside me all the time, and you, Alexei Ivanich, show me that Baron of yours, when we are out. A von Baron like that, I should like to have a look at him. Well, and where's the roulette?"

I explained that the roulette tables were in the Kursaal.

Next came the questions: Are there many of them? Do many people play? Do they play all day? How is it all arranged? At last I told her that the best thing for her to do would be to see it all with her own eyes, for it was rather hard to describe everything.

"Very well, then—take me straight there. You go in front, Alexei Ivanich!"

"Why, Aunt, d'you mean to say you're not even going to rest after your journey?" asked the General solicitously. He seemed to be rather embarrassed, and indeed everyone stirred and exchanged glances. They probably felt rather awkward, almost ashamed, at the idea of accompanying Babushka straight to the tables, where she was certain to display her eccentricity, this time in public. While they themselves had agreed to accompany her.

"Why should I rest? I'm not tired. I've been sitting for five days. We can go and see the springs and medicinal waters and all that, afterwards. And then that—what did you call it, Praskovya—peak or something?"

"Pointe."

"Very well—*pointe*. And what else is there to see here?"

"A great many things," said Paulina vaguely.

"You see, you don't know yourself! Marfa, you will come with me, too," she said to her maid.

"Why should she go, Aunt?" put in the General fussily. "That's really too much. They probably won't admit Potapich to the Kursaal, either."

"Nonsense! Is she to be left behind just because she's a servant? She's a human being, too. We've been jolting over the railway lines a whole week, and she wants to see, too. Who's she to go with but me? She's afraid to show her nose out of doors alone."

"But..."

"D'you mean you're ashamed to be seen with me? Then stay at home, nobody asked you. A fine General; my own husband was a general! And why should you all follow

me about, after all? I can see everything with Alexei Ivanich."

But de Grie insisted firmly that everyone should accompany her, declaring in the most flattering words that it was a pleasure to go with her, and so on. We all set off.

"Elle est tombée en enfance," repeated de Grie, to the General. *"Seule elle fera des bêtises."*

I could not catch the rest of what he said but it was clear that he had certain intentions, and that perhaps his hopes had even been revived.

It was about half a mile to the Kursaal. Our way lay through the chestnut avenue to the square, which lay right in front of the Kursaal. The General calmed down somewhat, since our procession, while decidedly eccentric, was at least dignified and respectable. After all, what was there to wonder at in the fact that a sick, enfeebled person, without the use of her legs, had arrived to take the waters? But the General obviously feared the casino; why should an invalid, a cripple, and an aged woman to boot, visit the gaming tables?

Paulina and Mademoiselle Blanche walked on either side of the rolling chair. Mademoiselle Blanche laughed, displayed demure gaiety, every now and then venturing on a kind of respectful playfulness with Babushka, and in the end almost winning her heart. But Paulina was forced to reply to Babushka's incessant, innumerable questions, such as, "Who's that just passed by? Who's that lady in a carriage? Is the town big? Is the park big? What are those trees? What's the name of those mountains? Are there eagles there? What's that queer roof?" Astley walked beside me, whispering in my ear that he expected a great deal of interest from this morning. Potapich and Marfa brought up the rear, walking behind the bath-chair, Potapich in his frock-coat and white tie, but in a peaked cap, and Marfa, a forty-year-old spinster, rosy-cheeked, but beginning to

go grey, in her cap, her print frock, and creaking goatskin boots. Babushka continually turned her head and spoke to them over her shoulder. De Grie and the General lagged behind a little, discussing something heatedly. The General was dejected, de Grie spoke with a resolute air. Perhaps he was trying to encourage the General; he was evidently giving him some advice. Only a short time ago Babushka had uttered the fatal sentence: "I'm not going to give you any money." De Grie might have considered this announcement incredible, but the General knew his aunt. Several times I noticed de Grie and Mademoiselle Blanche winking at one another. I could make out the Russian prince and the German traveller at the other end of the avenue. They had stayed behind and were now going away from us.

We arrived at the Kursaal in triumph. The hall porter and servants showed as much respect as the hotel servants had. But they could not help looking at us with great curiosity. At first Babushka had herself borne through all the halls. Some of the arrangements she praised, to others she was completely indifferent. She asked about everything. At last we came to the gaming halls. The footmen guarding the locked doors opened them wide, as if stunned.

The appearance of Babushka at the gaming table produced a profound impression on the public. Around the roulette table and at the other end of the hall where the *trente et quarante* table stood, something like a hundred and fifty or two hundred gamblers crowded, row upon row; those who had managed to push their way right up to the table stood firm as usual, never giving up their places till they had lost their stakes; for it was not allowed to stand there as a mere spectator and to occupy a place at the table without playing. Although there were chairs set round the table, very few of the gamblers sat down, especially when there was a great crowd, for one

could get closer standing, and consequently find a place, and it was easier to put down one's money. The people in the second and third rows jostled those in the first rows, keeping a sharp lookout for their turn. Sometimes in their impatience, they thrust a hand between the people in front, and flung down their stakes. Even those in the third row managed to do this every now and then. Owing to this, ten or even five minutes seldom passed without a quarrel arising as to whom the stakes here and there on the table belonged. The casino police were, however, quite efficient. The crowding was of course unavoidable, indeed they were glad of the influx, for it was profitable. And the eight croupiers seated around the table watched the stakes intently. They were the ones who paid out the money, and when arguments arose, they were the ones who settled them. In extreme cases the police were sent for, and the affair was over in the space of a minute. The police stood about the hall itself, in plain clothes, mingling with the public, so that it was impossible to spot them. They kept a sharp lookout for thieves and *chevaliers d'industrie*, of whom there are always a great many at roulette, thanks to the extraordinary convenience of the game for their "industry." Everywhere else thieving must be done by picking pockets and locks, and in case of failure this ends in a lot of fuss. But here you only have to go up to the roulette table, start playing, and suddenly, quite openly and publicly, pick up someone else's winnings and put them in your pocket. If an argument arises, the swindler insists at the top of his voice that it was his own stake. If the thing is done skilfully and the witnesses hesitate, the thief quite often manages to rake in the money, that is to say, of course, if the sum is not too great. When it is, the croupiers or even some of the gamblers, are sure to be on the lookout. If the sum is not very great, its true owner sometimes simply withdraws from the dispute, from dislike of a scandal, and goes away. But

if the thief is exposed, he is immediately turned out in disgrace.

Babushka regarded all this from a distance with intense curiosity. She was delighted when a thief was turned out. *Trente et quarante* did not interest her much—she preferred roulette, the rolling balls amused her. After a time she wished for a closer view of the game. How it happened I do not know, but the footmen and certain other bustling individuals (chiefly Poles who had lost their money, and were pressing their services on fortunate gamblers and all foreigners) immediately found a place and cleared the way for Babushka despite the crowd, right in the middle of the table, next to the chief croupier, and rolled her chair up to it. Several visitors who were not playing themselves, but simply observing the game (mostly English families, these), immediately crowded up to the table, to have a look at Babushka from behind the gamblers. Many lorgnettes were turned in her direction. Hope was born in the breasts of the croupiers—such an eccentric gambler seemed to promise something really unusual. The apparition of a seventy-year-old cripple woman who desired to gamble was of course no everyday occurrence. I pushed up to the table, too, and found a place beside Babushka. Potapich and Maria were far away, amidst the crowd. The General, Paulina, de Grie, and Mademoiselle Blanche also took up places in the distance, with the onlookers.

At first Babushka contented herself with looking at the gamblers. She showered me with sharp abrupt questions in a loud whisper: "Who's that man? Who's that woman?" She was particularly struck by a very young man at the end of the table, who was playing very high, staking thousands at a time, and who had, it was whispered around, already won up to forty thousand francs, which lay before him in a heap, in gold coins and banknotes. He was pale, his eyes gleaming and his hands shaking. He

was by now playing quite recklessly, staking as much as his hands could hold, winning all the time, and raking in the money. The servants bustled around him, placing a chair at his back, clearing a space around him, so that he should have more room, so that no one should jostle him—and all in the hope of a rich reward. Gamblers who win sometimes give tips without even counting the money, in their joy simply taking the money out of their pockets in handfuls. A Pole had already taken his place next to the young man, and was fussing about indefatigably, respectfully whispering to him all the time, probably telling him where to place his stakes, counselling him, directing his play, also of course in lively expectation of favours to come. But the gambler scarcely glanced at him, staked wildly, and raked in the winnings every time. He had evidently quite lost his head.

Babushka watched him for several minutes.

“Tell him to stop,” said Babushka, nudging me officiously. “Tell him to pick up his money and go away at once! He’ll lose, he’ll lose it all in a minute!” She was fairly panting with excitement. “Where’s Potapich? Send Potapich to him. Tell him, tell him!” She nudged me again. “Wherever is Potapich? *Sortez! Sortez!*” she cried, speaking directly to the young man. I bent over her and whispered sternly that she must not shout here, and that even raising the voice ever so slightly was not allowed, for it interfered with the reckoning and we should be turned out at once.

“What a shame! He’s lost! He won’t be saved! I can hardly bear to look at him! What an oaf!”

Babushka turned aside quickly.

At the left, at the other half of the table, a young woman and a sort of dwarf sitting beside her were very conspicuous. Who this dwarf was—a relative of hers, or simply taken about by her for the sake of effect—I do not know. The lady I had noticed before. She appeared

at the tables every day, at one o'clock, and left at two sharp. Every day she gambled for one hour. All the casino staff knew her, and she was immediately given a chair. She drew some gold coins and a few thousand-franc notes from her pocket, and began placing them quietly and coolly, jotting down figures in pencil on a piece of paper, and trying to find the system by which, at a given moment, the chances were grouped. She played high. Every day she won two, at the most three thousand francs, no more, and, having won, left immediately. Babushka watched her for a long time.

"Ah, that one won't lose—that one won't lose! Who is she? Don't you know? Who is she?"

"She's French, I think, a you-know-what," I whispered.

"Oh, yes—you can see from her flight what kind of a bird she is! Her claws are no doubt sharp enough. Now tell me what every turn of the wheel means, and how to stake."

I did my best to explain to Babushka the meaning of these innumerable combinations—*rouge et noir, pair et impair, manque et passe* and, finally, the various nuances in the system of numbers. She listened attentively, making mental notes, begging me to repeat my explanations, putting fresh questions, committing it all to memory. Examples of every system of play could be found on the spot, so that a great deal could be learned and memorized with ease and rapidity. Babushka was delighted.

"And what is zero? That croupier there, the curly one, the chief one, shouted zero just now. And why does he rake in everything on the table? Oh, what a lot, and he's taken it all! What does that mean?"

"Zero is what the bank makes. If the ball stops at zero, everything on the table belongs to the bank. True, you are allowed one more chance, to see if you can get a draw, but the bank pays nothing, anyhow."

"Well, I never! And don't I get anything?"

"No, Babushka. If you had placed your money on zero, and it stopped at zero, you would get thirty-five times what you staked."

"Thirty-five times—does it often happen? Why don't they do it, then, the fools?"

"There are thirty-six chances against its happening. Babushka."

"Nonsense! Potapich! Potapich! Wait a minute, I have some money on me. There!" she drew a tightly stuffed purse out of her pocket and extracted a friedrichsdor from it. "There—put it on zero at once."

"But Babushka, zero has only just turned up," I told her. "It probably won't come round again for a long time. You're sure to lose. Wait a little"

"Go on, now—put it down!"

"I will, since you ask me. But it may not come round till the evening! You may lose up to a thousand. Such things do happen, you know!"

"Pooh, pooh! Little venture little have! Lost, have we? Put down another!"

The second friedrichsdor was lost, too. A third was staked. Babushka could hardly stay in her place, her burning eyes were fixed on the ball dancing in and out of the indentations of the whirling wheel. The third, too, was lost. Babushka was almost beside herself, she could hardly sit still, and when the croupier announced "*trente six*" instead of the longed for zero, she actually banged on the table with her fist.

"Deuce take it!" raged Babushka. "Will that accursed zero never come round? I'll wait till it does as long as there's life in my body. It's all that accursed curly-haired croupier, he never brings any luck! Alexei Ivanich, put down two gold coins at once! If we go on losing like this zero won't help us much."

"Babushka!"

"Go on, go on! It's not your money."

I put down two friedrichsdors. The ball spun round and round for a long time before beginning to bounce up and down the indentations. Babushka watched it with bated breath, squeezing my hand, and suddenly—pop!

“Zéro!” cried out the croupier.

“You see, you see!” cried Babushka, turning swiftly towards me, radiant and ecstatic. “I told you so, I told you so! The Lord himself must have put it into my head to stake two! Well, now how much do I get? Why don’t they give it to me? Potapich! Marfa! Where are they? Have our folks all gone away? Potapich, Potapich!”

“Afterwards, Babushka!” I whispered. “Potapich is at the door, they won’t let him come in. Look, they’re giving you your money, take it!”

A heavy rouleau containing fifty friedrichsdors sealed in blue paper was flung to Babushka, and twenty friedrichsdors not wrapped up at all were counted out on the table. I scooped it all up with the rake and gave it to her.

“*Faites le jeu, Messieurs! Faites le jeu, Messieurs! Rien ne va plus?*” cried the croupier inviting the players to put down their money, and preparing to spin the wheel.

“Oh, heavens! I’m too late! It’s just going to start! Put something down, for goodness’ sake!” cried Babushka. “Hurry up!” she added, wildly excited, nudging me violently.

“What shall I put it on, Babushka?”

“On zero, on zero! Always on zero! Stake all you can! How much have we altogether? Seventy friedrichsdors? Why should I grudge the money, put down twenty friedrichsdors all at once!”

“Think what you are doing, Babushka! It may not come round for another two hundred times. You will lose all your money, I assure you!”

“None of that! Put them down! What a tongue you

have! I know what I'm doing!" said Babushka, fairly shaking with excitement.

"According to the regulations, it is not allowed to stake more than twelve friedrichsdors on zero, Babushka—well, I've staked them."

"Not allowed! I don't believe it! Monsieur, Monsieur!" and she nudged the croupier seated to the left of her, who was preparing to spin the wheel. "*Combien zéro? Douze? Douze?*"

I hastened to put the question in French.

"*Oui, Madame,*" said the croupier civilly, corroborating my statement. "And according to the regulations no individual stake may exceed four thousand florins," he added, by way of further explanation.

"Well, it can't be helped—put down twelve."

"*Le jeu est fait!*" cried the croupier. The wheel revolved and stopped at thirteen. We had lost.

"Again, again! Stake some more!" shouted Babushka.

I no longer tried to resist her and shrugging my shoulders put down another twelve friedrichsdors. The wheel rotated for a long time. Babushka fairly trembled as she followed its revolutions. "Can she really think zero will win again?" I wondered, gazing at her in astonishment. The sanguine expectation that she would win, the firm conviction that there would soon be a cry of zero irradiated her features. The ball hopped into an indentation.

"*Zéro!*" cried the croupier.

"Ha-ha!" cried Babushka, turning to me in frenzied triumph.

I am a gambler myself, and at that moment I realized it. My hands shook, my knees wobbled, my head went round. It was of course an exceptional case for zero to turn up three times out of ten, but there was nothing so particularly astonishing about it. I had myself, the day before yesterday, seen zero turn up three times running, while one of the gamblers, zealously jotting down the

strokes on paper, remarked aloud that the day before zero had only once turned up in twenty-four hours.

Babushka was paid up with the courtesy and respect due to one who has gained considerable winnings. She received precisely four hundred and twenty friedrichsdors—in other words, four thousand florins and twenty friedrichsdors. The twenty friedrichsdors were given to her in gold, and the four thousand florins in banknotes.

This time Babushka did not call for Potapich. She had something else to do. She did not even nudge me or—outwardly, at least—tremble. She trembled inwardly if I may thus express myself. She seemed to be completely absorbed, her whole being was tense.

"Alexei Ivanich! He said one can only stake four thousand florins at a time, didn't he? Take them, put all four on the red," decided Babushka.

It was useless to try and dissuade her. The wheel turned.

"*Rouge!*" announced the croupier.

Another four thousand florins won—eight thousand altogether.

"Hand me over four, and put four on the red again," ordered Babushka.

I put down four thousand again.

"*Rouge!*" announced the croupier again.

"That makes twelve altogether. Give it here! Put the gold here in the purse, and put the banknotes away. Enough! Home! Wheel the chair back!"

CHAPTER XI

The chair was wheeled back to the doors at the other end of the hall. Babushka was radiant. All our party immediately crowded round her with congratulations. Eccentric as Babushka's behaviour was, her triumph nevertheless covered a multitude of sins and the General no

longer feared to compromise himself in the eyes of the public by coming forward as a relative of such an odd personage. He congratulated Babushka with an indulgent, familiar smile, as if humouring a child. But he seemed to be thunder-struck, like all the rest of the spectators. People kept going past to get a nearer look at her. Mr. Astley was talking about her a little apart with two English friends of his. A few dignified lady spectators looked at her in majestic amazement, as if she were some sort of monster. De Grie fairly exuded congratulations and smiles.

"*Quelle victoire!*" he cried.

"*Mais, Madame, c'était du feu!*" added Mademoiselle Blanche with an ingratiating smile.

"Yes, yes, I simply went and won twelve thousand florins. Twelve thousand, did I say—and what about the gold? With the gold it comes to almost thirteen. How much is that in our money? About six thousand, isn't it?"

I informed her that it would be over seven thousand, which, according to the present rate of exchange, would probably come to eight thousand rubles.

"That's something—eight thousand! And you all sit here like dunces, doing nothing. Potapich, Marfa, did you see?"

"Oh, madame, how did you do it? Eight thousand rubles!" exclaimed Marfa, wriggling ecstatically.

"Here you are—here's five gold pieces for you, take them!"

Potapich and Marfa rushed to kiss her hands.

"And give the porters a friedrichsdor each. Give them a ducat each, Alexei Ivanich. Who's that footman bowing, and that one, too? Are they congratulating me? Give them each a friedrichsdor, too."

"*Madame la princesse—un pauvre expatrié—malheur continué—les princes russes sont si généreux—*" A mous-

tached individual in a shabby overcoat and gaudy waistcoat, raising his peaked cap high and smiling deferentially, was hovering round the bath-chair.

"Give *him* a friedrichsdor, too. No, give him two! That'll do now, or there'll be no end to them. Lift me up, take me away! Praskovya!" she said, turning to Paulina Alexandrovna, "I'll buy you a dress-length tomorrow, and one for Mademoiselle—what's her name, Mademoiselle Blanche, is it?—I'll buy her a dress-length, too. Tell her, Praskovya!"

"*Merci, Madame,*" said Mademoiselle Blanche, curtsying obsequiously, her lips curved in the mocking smile she exchanged with de Grie and the General. The latter, who was obviously somewhat embarrassed, seemed to be greatly relieved when we turned into the avenue.

"And Fedosya! Won't *she* be surprised?" said Babushka, remembering her old friend, the General's nurse. "She must have a new dress, too. Alexei Ivanich, Alexei Ivanich! Give something to that beggar!"

A ragged, crooked-backed fellow passing by had looked towards us.

"He may not be a beggar, he may just be some rascal."

"Give him something! Give him a gulden!"

I went up and handed the man a coin. He gazed at me in utter amazement, but took the gulden in silence. He smelt of drink.

"And you, Alexei Ivanich—haven't you tried your luck yet?"

"No, Babushka."

"And yet your eyes burned—I saw."

"I'll try my luck one day, Babushka, indeed I will—later."

"And put your money straight on zero! You'll see! How much have you got?"

"Only twelve friedrichsdors altogether, Babushka."

"Not much, I'll lend you fifty friedrichsdors, if you like. Take this rouleau here. But don't think I shall give *you* anything, sir," she said, suddenly turning on the General.

The General winced, but he said nothing. De Grie scowled.

"*Que diable, c'est une terrible vieille!*" he whispered through his teeth to the General.

"A beggar, a beggar, another beggar!" cried Babushka. "Alexei Ivanich, give that one a gulden, too."

This time we had encountered a grey-haired old man with a wooden leg, in a long blue frock-coat, carrying a tall staff in his hand. He looked like an old soldier. When I stretched out a gulden to him he retreated a step and looked at me threateningly.

"*Was ist's, der Teufel!*" he shouted, and added a string of expletives.

"A fool, that's all!" cried Babushka, with a wave of her hand. "Push on! I'm hungry! Time for dinner now, then I'll lie down for a short time, and go back there again."

"You mean to play again, Babushka?" I cried.

"What d'you think? Just because you sit and sulk, am I to do nothing but sit and look at you?"

"*Mais, Madame,*" de Grie accosted her, "*les chances peuvent tourner, une seule mauvaise chance, et vous perdrez tout—surtout avec votre jeu—c'était terrible!*"

"*Vous perdrez absolument,*" twittered Mademoiselle Blanche.

"And what is that to do with all of you? It's my money I'll lose, not yours! Where's that Mr. Astley?" she asked me.

"He stayed at the Kursaal, Babushka."

"A pity! Now *there's* a nice man."

When we got home, Babushka, meeting the head waiter on the stairs, called him to her and boasted of her win-

nings. Then she called Fedosya, gave her three friedrichsdors and ordered dinner to be served. Fedosya and Marfa made the most of the incident during dinner.

"As I stood watching you, ma'am," Marfa chirped, "I said to Potapich, 'What is she about?' I said. And all that money on the table! Good Lord, I don't think I ever saw so much money in my life, and all those ladies and gentlemen, no one but ladies and gentlemen sitting round. And where, I said to Potapich, where can all those gentlefolk have come from? And oh, I thought, I hope the Holy Virgin will help her! And I started praying for you, ma'am, my heart went pit-a-pat, I was all of a tremble. Oh, Lord, send her luck, I prayed! And the Lord did. And I'm all of a tremble still, ma'am, all of a tremble!"

"Alexei Ivanich! Be ready to go with me after dinner—about four o'clock. And now good-bye for the present, and don't forget to send a doctor-fellow to me. I must take the waters, too, before I forget!"

I left Babushka as if in a dream. I tried to imagine how it would be with our folk now, and what turn affairs would take. I saw clearly that they had not yet quite recovered their senses and were still half stunned by the shock—especially the General. The fact of Babushka's arrival instead of the hourly awaited telegram announcing her death (and, consequently, their inheritance) had so utterly quelled all their intentions and decisions, that they anticipated further feats by Babushka at the roulette table as if stunned. And yet this second fact was, if anything, still more important than the first, for though Babushka had twice declared she would not give the General any money, who could say? One should not lose hope yet. De Grie, so deeply involved in all the General's affairs, had not done so. And I am sure Mademoiselle Blanche, who is also deeply involved (after all—to be the General's lady and come in for a considerable heritage!), will not give up hope and will use all the fascination of her wiles with Babush-

ka—in contrast to the proud, stubborn Paulina who does not know how to ingratiate herself. But now, with Babushka perpetrating such feats at roulette, now, when Babushka's personality had impressed itself on us so clearly and vividly (a crotchety despotic old lady, *et tombée en enfance*), now perhaps all was ruined. For in her childish eagerness she was sure to lose every penny she had. Great heavens, I thought (and, God forgive me, with the most malicious laughter!), why, every friedrichsdor staked by Babushka this morning must have been a dagger in the General's heart, must have infuriated de Grie and driven Mademoiselle Blanche, who saw her chances slipping away, into a frenzy. And yet another fact—even when Babushka won, showering money right and left, in her joy, and taking every passer-by for a beggar, even then she had warned the General: "But I'm not going to give *you* any money"—that meant she had made up her mind, that she was sticking to it, that she had made herself a vow. Dangerous, very dangerous!

All these considerations passed through my mind as I ascended the front stairs to my little cell on the top floor. I found the problem an absorbing one. I had of course long ago discovered the most important and strongest strands of the rope binding the actors on the stage before me, but I had not quite known all the ins and outs of their acting. I had never enjoyed Paulina's entire confidence, though it is true she had occasionally, as it were involuntarily, opened her heart to me. But I had noticed that very often, in fact almost always, after such disclosures she either tried to turn everything she had said into a joke, or muddled it all up, purposely making it appear false. Oh, there was much that she concealed! At any rate I felt that the whole of this tense, mysterious situation was working towards a finale. One more blow—and all would be over, all exposed! I scarcely troubled to think about my own role—though I, too, was involved in it all. My state of mind is

strange. I only have twenty friedrichsdors in my pocket, I am far from home in a strange country, with no position and no means of support, without hope, without any definite plan, and it does not seem to worry me in the least! But for the thought of Paulina I would simply revel in the comic aspect of the coming *dénouement*, would laugh heartily. But Paulina worries me. Her fate is in the balance, that I have long foreseen, but I'm afraid it isn't her fate that worries me. What I want is to penetrate into her secrets, I should like her to come to me and say: "But I love you!" or if not, if this is the height of madness, then—then what is it that I want? As if I knew what I wanted! I am a lost soul. I only want to be near her, within her aura, her radiance, always and for ever, my whole life. That is all I know. As if I could ever leave her!

On the third floor, in their corridor, I had a feeling as if somebody had jostled against me. I turned—twenty paces away, a little farther perhaps, I saw Paulina coming out of a room. She must have been on the lookout for me, for as soon as she saw me she beckoned to me to come to her.

"Paulina Alexandrovna—"

"Hush!" she said.

"Fancy!" I whispered, "I felt as if somebody actually gave me a tap on my side. I look up, and—there you are. A kind of electricity seems to come from you."

"Take this letter," said Paulina, with a preoccupied frown. No doubt she had not heard what I said, "and give it to Mr. Astley personally, this minute. Hurry up, please, there's no answer. He—"

She broke off.

"Mr. Astley?" I echoed in astonishment.

But Paulina had already disappeared behind the closed door.

"Aha, so they correspond!" Of course I ran off immediately to look for Mr. Astley, first in his hotel, where I

did not find him, and then in the Kursaal, where I went through all the halls and at last, in great vexation, almost in despair, went out again and met him quite by chance, among a cavalcade of Englishmen and Englishwomen on horseback. I beckoned to him, stopped his horse, and handed him the letter. We did not even have time to exchange glances. But I suspect that Mr. Astley spurred on his horse purposely.

Was I tortured by jealousy? I am not sure, but my spirits were very low. I did not even wish to know what they wrote to each other about. And so he is her confidant! He is certainly a friend, I thought, that's very clear (and how did he become one in so short a time?)—but is there love, too? My reason of course whispered to me that there could not be. But reason alone counts for very little in such cases. At any rate this, too, must be elucidated. Things are becoming unpleasantly complicated.

The moment I entered the hotel, the hall porter and the head waiter, who came out of his room for the purpose, informed me that they were looking for me, that they had sent down three times to find out where I was, and that I was requested to come to the General's room immediately. I was in an exceedingly bad humour. In the General's sitting-room I found, as well as the General himself, de Grie and Mademoiselle Blanche, who was alone, without her mother, that is. The mother is a mere figurehead, only needed for special occasions. When there is real business on foot, Mademoiselle Blanche manages her own life, and it is unlikely that the good lady knows much about her so-called daughter's affairs.

The three of them were in eager council, and the door of the sitting-room was actually locked, an unprecedented thing. As I approached the room I heard loud voices—the insolent, offensive voice of de Grie, the infuriated, impertinent cries of Blanche, and the piteous tones of the General, evidently making excuses for himself. At my appear-

ance they all seemed to catch themselves up sharp, and try to look natural. De Grie smoothed his hair and changed his scowl to a smile, one of those nasty, correct French smiles which I so detest. The General, listless and abject, made a half-hearted attempt to look dignified. Mademoiselle Blanche alone took no trouble to change the furious expression of her face; she only stopped talking, fixing her gaze on me in expectant impatience. I may remark that so far she had treated me with extraordinary neglect, not even responding to my bows—she simply ignored me.

"Alexei Ivanich," began the General in tones of tender remonstrance, "I must say I am surprised, greatly surprised. Your behaviour towards myself and my family—in a word, it is most strange ... exceedingly strange...."

"*Eh, ce n'est pas ça,*" interrupted de Grie with angry scorn (he has certainly got a hold on them all!). "*Mon cher Monsieur, notre cher général se trompe,* in taking such a tone." (I will continue to give his words in Russian.) "What he wanted to tell you was—that is to say, he wished to warn you, or rather, to request you earnestly not to ruin him—yes, that's it, not to ruin him! I employ this expression advisedly—"

"But how? How?" I interrupted.

"Why, you have undertaken to look after (how shall I say it?) this old woman, *cette pauvre terrible vieille,*" said de Grie, getting rather mixed himself. "But she's sure to lose. She'll lose everything to the last penny! You have seen for yourself, you were a witness of the way she gambles. If she starts losing she will never leave the tables, from sheer obstinacy, from rage, she will go on and on playing, and in such cases the money is never won back and then ... then—"

"And then," put in the General, "then you will have ruined the whole family! My family and I are her heirs, she has no other near relations. I tell you frankly—my

affairs are in disorder, in great disorder. You know something about it yourself—if she loses a great sum or, as is probable, her whole fortune—oh, my God! What will become of them then, of my children (the General shot a glance at de Grie), of myself! (Here he glanced at Mademoiselle Blanche, who turned from him in disgust.) Oh, Alexei Ivanich, save us, save us!”

“But, General, what am I to do? Tell me, how I can . . . who am I among you all?”

“Give it up, give it up—leave her alone!”

“But others will take my place,” I said.

“*Ce n'est pas ça, ce n'est pas ça!*” interrupted de Grie again. “*Que diable!* No, don't give her up, but at least advise her, dissuade her, distract her—*Enfin*, do not let her lose too much, try to distract her.”

“But how can I? You ought to undertake it yourself, Monsieur de Grie,” I added as naively as I could.

Here I caught a rapid, fiery, interrogatory glance from Mademoiselle Blanche to de Grie; a strange, revealing expression that he could not conceal flashed across de Grie's features.

“That's just it! You see, she wouldn't accept me, now!” he cried, with a wave of his hand. “If only then—”

De Grie cast a rapid significant glance at Mademoiselle Blanche.

“*Oh, mon cher Monsieur Alexis, soyez si bon!*” said Mademoiselle Blanche herself, stepping up to me with a fascinating smile, taking both my hands in hers, and pressing them warmly. The devil! That diabolical countenance knew how to change in a single instant. At that moment she displayed such an imploring face, her smile was so sweet, so childlike, so playfull She ended by winking archly at me, on the sly. Did she think to conquer me with a single blow? It wasn't so badly done, either, but it was crude, terribly crude. The General leaped up—yes, leaped—after her.

"Do forgive me, Alexei Ivanich, for beginning to speak to you as I did just now, that wasn't what I wanted to say! . . . I entreat you, I beg you, I bow low before you in the Russian fashion—you alone can save us—you alone! Mademoiselle de Cominges and I implore you—you understand, you do, don't you?" he begged, indicating Mademoiselle Blanche with a sidelong look. He was really extremely pathetic.

Just then there came three gentle, respectful knocks at the door. When it was opened it appeared that it was the corridor attendant who had knocked, and a few steps behind him was Potapich. The emissaries were from Babushka. She had sent them to find me and take me to her at once. "She is displeased," volunteered Potapich.

"But it's only half past three!"

"She could not sleep, and kept tossing all the time, and now she has got up and ordered her chair, and sent for you. She's in the porch already—"

"*Quelle mégère!*" cried de Grie.

I really did find Babushka in the porch, impatient at my absence. She had not been able to wait till four.

"Come on—lift me up!" she commanded, and we set off for the Kursaal again.

CHAPTER XII

Babushka was in an impatient, irritable state. It was clear that her head was full of roulette. She was oblivious to all else, and seemed very absent-minded. She hardly put a single question the whole way. Catching sight of a luxurious carriage which dashed past us like a whirlwind, she did raise her hand and ask: "What's that? Whose is it?" but seemed not to hear my answer. Every now and then she was startled out of her abstraction by some impatient movement or sudden whim. When I showed her

the Baron and Baroness Wurmerhelm in the distance, just as we were approaching the Kursaal, she looked round absently with an indifferent "Oh!" and turned swiftly to Potapich and Marfa who were trudging behind.

"What are you trailing after me for? I'm not bound to take you every time! Go home! You are quite enough for me," she added, addressing myself, when, hastily bowing, the servants turned towards the hotel.

In the Kursaal they were already expecting Babushka, and her old place, next to the croupier, was immediately secured for her. I have often thought that these croupiers, who are always so correct and bear themselves like ordinary officials, as if they did not care whether the bank won or lost, are by no means indifferent to the bank's losses, and are undoubtedly provided with certain instructions for the attraction of gamblers, and told to keep a sharp lookout for the interests of the management, for which services they obviously receive prizes and bonuses. At any rate they regarded Babushka as their prey. Then what everyone had prophesied, occurred.

This is how it was.

Babushka started straight away on zero, immediately ordering me to put down twelve friedrichsdors. She did so once, twice, and again—zero did not turn up.

"Go on, go on!" said Babushka, nudging me impatiently. I obeyed.

"How many times have we staked?" she asked at last, grinding her teeth in her impatience.

"Twelve times, Babushka. We have lost a hundred and forty-four friedrichsdors. I assure you, Babushka, zero will probably not turn up again till late in the evening—"

"Quiet!" snapped Babushka. "Put some on zero, and a thousand guldens on the red at once! Here, here's a bank-note!"

The wheel stopped at red, but the money on zero was lost again. A thousand guldens were recovered.

"You see, you see!" whispered Babushka. "We've got back almost all we staked. Stake on zero again—we'll stake another ten times and then stop."

But at the fifth rotation Babushka was quite dejected.

"To the devil with that beastly zero! Come on, put the whole four thousand guildens on the red," she ordered.

"Babushka! That's too much. Supposing the red doesn't come round?" I entreated. But Babushka almost struck me. (Altogether her nudges were so violent that they practically amounted to blows.) There was nothing for it but to put the whole four thousand guildens won in the morning on the red. The wheel went round. Babushka sat there calmly, holding herself proudly erect, never doubting that she must inevitably win.

"*Zéro*," announced the croupier.

At first Babushka did not understand, but when she saw the croupier rake up her four thousand guildens with the rest of the money on the table, and discovered that zero, which had been so long in coming round, and on which we had staked and lost almost two hundred friedrichsdors, had turned up as if to spite her just when Babushka had abused it and given it up, she gasped, throwing out her arms in front of everyone. There was actually laughter among the onlookers.

"Goodness gracious! The accursed thing came round after all!" howled Babushka. "What an accursed, accursed thing! It's your fault, all your fault!" and she turned on me fiercely, at the same time giving me a shove. "You wouldn't let me go on!"

"It was only common-sense, Babushka—how can I answer for all the chances?"

"You and your chances!" she whispered furiously. "Get away from me!"

"Good-bye, Babushka," and I turned to leave.

"Alexei Ivanich! Alexei Ivanich, stay! Where are you going? What's the matter, now? He's angry, the fool!"

Come on, now, stay with me a little longer, don't be angry, it's I who am the fool! Tell me what to do now."

"I will not undertake to advise you, Babushka, because you will only blame me. Play yourself—tell me what you want and I'll put down the money."

"Well, well, well! Put down another four thousand guildens on the red! Here's my wallet—take it!" She took it out of her pocket and handed it to me. "Come on, take it, there are twenty thousand silver rubles in it."

"Babushka!" I faltered, "such a stake—"

"I'll win it back even if it kills me. Put it down!"

We staked and lost.

"Once more—stake the whole eight thousand that's left."

"I can't, Babushka, the highest stake is four thousand."

"Stake four, then!"

This time we won. Babushka cheered up.

"You see, you see!" she nudged me. "Put on four again."

I did so, and lost. And after this we lost again twice running.

"The whole twelve have gone, Babushka," I reported.

"I see they have," she said in a kind of quiet frenzy, if I may so express myself. "I see they have, sir," she muttered, looking straight in front of her without moving. She was evidently thinking hard. "Come on—stake another four thousand guildens—I don't care if it kills me!"

"There's no more money left, Babushka. There's nothing in your wallet but our five per cents and some transfers—no money."

"And in the purse?"

"Just a little small change."

"Are there exchange bureaus here? I was told we could exchange all our money here," said Babushka resolutely.

"Plenty, of course! But you would lose enough on the exchange to frighten a Jew."

"Nonsense! I'll win it back! Take me there. Call those blockheads!"

I wheeled back the chair, the porters appeared, and we rolled out of the Kursaal.

"Quicker, quicker!" commanded Babushka. "Show the way, Alexei Ivanich, stop at the nearest. . . . Is it far?"

"Quite near, Babushka."

At the turning out of the square into the avenue we met our whole party: the General, de Grie, and Mademoiselle Blanche with her mother. Paulina Alexandrovna was not among them, however. Neither was Mr. Astley.

"There! Don't stop!" cried Babushka. "What is it you want? I have no time for you!"

I walked behind the chair. De Grie rushed up to me.

"She lost all the morning's takings and twelve thousand guildens besides," I just had time to whisper. "We're going to change some five per cents, now."

De Grie stamped his foot and rushed to inform the General.

Babushka's chair rolled on.

"Stop her! Stop her!" whispered the General to me frantically.

"Just you try yourself," I whispered back.

"Auntie," said the General approaching. "Auntie, we are just, just—" his voice broke and died away, "we are going to hire horses for a ride outside town—exquisite view—the *pointe*. We were on our way to invite you—"

"Go away, you and your *pointe*!" said Babushka, waving him away irritably.

"There's a village—we'll have tea there," continued the General in utter despair.

"*Nous boirons du lait, sur l'herbe fraiche*," added de Grie furiously.

"*Du lait, de l'herbe fraiche*"—that is the one lyrical ideal of the Paris bourgeois—it symbolizes, as everyone knows, their entire attitude to "*la nature et la vérité*."

"Go away, you and your milk! Swill it down yourself, it gives me the belly-ache. What are you pestering me for?" shouted Babushka. "I've no time, I tell you!"

"Here we are, Babushka!" I cried. "This is the place."

We rolled up to the house in which the banker's office was situated. I went to change the notes, Babushka waiting for me outside. De Grie, the General, and Blanche stood a little way away, in perplexity.

Babushka darted an angry glance at them and they moved away along the road to the Kursaal.

I was offered such disastrous terms that I could not make up my mind to accept them and went back to Babushka for instructions.

"Oh, the rogues!" she cried, throwing out her arms. "Well, never mind! Do it!" she cried resolutely. "Wait! Call the manager to me!"

"One of the clerks, perhaps, Babushka?"

"Well, a clerk, it's all the same. Oh, the rogues!"

The clerk consented to come out, on being told that he was sent for by an old, enfeebled countess who could not walk. Babushka accused him long, furiously, and loudly of swindling, and tried to bargain with him in a mixture of Russian, French, and German, while I helped out as interpreter. The grave clerk looked from one to the other of us and shook his head in silence. At Babushka he stared with a curiosity that was almost rude. At last a smile appeared on his face.

"Get away with you then!" cried Babushka. "Choke yourself on my money! Change it here, Alexei Ivanich, there's no time, or I'd go somewhere else—"

"He says you'd get still less anywhere else."

I cannot remember exactly the rates we got, but they were appalling. I changed papers to the value of twelve thousand florins in gold and banknotes, and carried it all out to Babushka.

"Come on, come on! Never mind counting it!" she said, with a wave of her hands. "Hurry up—quick!"

"I'll never put anything on that accursed zero again, or on the red either," she announced as we approached the Kursaal.

This time I did my utmost to persuade her to stake as low as possible, pointing out that when the luck turned it would not be too late to put down high stakes. But she was so impatient that, though at first agreeing, there was no holding her during the play. As soon as she began to win, after staking ten and twenty friedrichsdors, she took to nudging me and crying: "I told you so! You see—we've won! If we had staked four thousand guldens instead of ten friedrichdors we should have won four thousand, and now look! It's your fault, all your fault!"

Much as the way she gambled vexed me, I at last decided to say nothing, and to give no more advice.

Suddenly de Grie appeared, and there were the three of them at our side. I noticed that Mademoiselle Blanche and her mamma stood a little apart exchanging courtesies with the Russian prince. The General was obviously out of favour, almost completely neglected. Blanche would not so much as look at him, though he danced around her for all he was worth. Poor General! He paled, flushed, agonized, and did not even watch Babushka play. Blanche and the prince at last went away; the General almost ran after them.

"Madame, Madamel!" whispered de Grie in honeyed accents, squeezing right up to her. "Madame, you can't put down such a stake. . . . You can't—no, no," he said in broken Russian, "no, no!"

"Can't I? Well, teach me!" Babushka said to him.

De Grie suddenly began chattering rapidly in French, advising, fussing, telling her she must wait for a chance, making certain swift calculations—Babushka understood not a word. He kept asking me to interpret, tapping on

the table with one finger, and pointing. At last he seized a pencil and began jotting down figures. Babushka finally lost all patience with him.

"Get along with you—you're talking a lot of rubbish! 'Madame, madame!' You don't know a thing about it yourself. Get along with you!"

"*Mais, Madame,*" twittered de Grie, and again began explaining and instructing. He was terribly worked up.

"Well, stake for once the way he wants us to," Babushka commanded me. "We'll see, perhaps it'll turn out all right."

All de Grie wanted was to distract her from staking too high. He suggested staking on numbers, one at a time and in combinations. Following his instructions I put one friedrichsdor on each of a series of odd numbers up to twelve, and five on a group of numbers from twelve to eighteen, and from eighteen to twenty-four. Altogether I staked sixteen friedrichsdors.

The wheel rotated.

"*Zéro!*" cried the croupier.

We had lost all the money.

"Blockhead!" cried Babushka, turning to de Grie. "Miserable Frenchie! Advice indeed! Get out! Doesn't understand a thing, and yet sticks his nose in!"

Mortally insulted, de Grie shrugged his shoulders and retired, with a scornful glance at Babushka. He was furious with himself for having butted in, for his lack of self-restraint.

An hour later, try as we would, we had lost all.

"Home!" cried Babushka.

She never uttered a word till we got to the avenue. Once there, and all the way to the hotel, exclamations broke from her continually:

"Fool that I am! Silly fool! You're a silly old fool, you are!"

As soon as we got to her suite Babushka cried: "I'll have tea, then we'll pack and be gone!"

"And where does madame mean to go?" ventured Marfa.

"What's that to you? Know your place! Potapich, pack everything, bag and baggage. We're going back, to Moscow! I have squandered fifteen thousand gold rubles!"

"Fifteen thousand, Madame! Dear Lord!" began Potapich, throwing out his arms in amazement, no doubt thinking to please.

"None of that, fool! None of your whining! Quiet! Pack the things! The bill, quick!"

"The next train leaves at half past nine, Babushka," I told her, to check her frenzy.

"And what's the time now?"

"Half past eight."

"How annoying! Well, never mind! Alexei Ivanich, I haven't a penny left. Here are two more notes, run along and change them for me. I have no money for the journey, you know."

I did as she told me. Half an hour later, returning to the hotel, I found all our friends in Babushka's room. The news that Babushka was going back to Moscow for good had apparently excited them even more than her losses. True, her departure might be the means of saving her fortune, but what was to become of the General? Who was to pay de Grief? Mademoiselle Blanche would of course not wait for Babushka to die, and would most likely now skip off with the Russian prince or someone else. They stood before her, propitiating and dissuading. Paulina was absent again. Babushka was shouting furiously at them.

"Leave me alone, devils! What's it to do with you? What does that one with the goatee want with me?" she shouted at de Grief. "And you, you shrimp, what do you

want?" she cried to Mademoiselle Blanche. "What are you buzzing about for?"

"*Diantre!*" whispered Mademoiselle Blanche, her eyes blazing with anger, but she suddenly burst out laughing and turned away.

"*Elle vivra cent ans!*" she cried to the General as she went out.

"Ah, so you were counting on my death, were you?" Babushka screamed at the General. "Get out! Turn them all out, Alexei Ivanich! What's it to do with you all? It was my money I lost, not yours!"

The General, cornered, shrugged his shoulders, and went out of the room. De Grie followed him.

"Call Praskovya," said Babushka to Marfa.

Five minutes later Marfa came back with Paulina, who had all this time been in her own room with the children and seemed to have made up her mind not to go out the whole day. Her face was grave, mournful, and worried.

"Praskovya," Babushka began, "is it true what I happened to hear just now, that that fool of a stepfather of yours wants to marry that feather-brained French girl? She's an actress, isn't she, if not something still worse? Tell me, is it true?"

"I don't know for certain, Babushka," replied Paulina. "But from what Mademoiselle Blanche herself, who sees no reason to conceal it, says, I conclude—"

"That'll do!" said Babushka, interrupting her energetically. "I see it all! I have always believed it would come to this with him, I have always considered him a shallow featherpate. Giving himself airs because he's a General (he was only a Colonel and got promotion on retiring), and thinking the world of himself. I know all about it, my dear, how you sent telegram after telegram to Moscow: 'Isn't the old woman going to kick the bucket soon?' Hoping for the inheritance! Without money, that paltry wench, that what's her name—de Cominges, isn't

it?—wouldn't take him as her lackey, him and his false teeth! They say she has a pile of money herself and lends it on interest, she's made a fortune. I'm not blaming you, Praskovya, it wasn't you who sent the telegrams. And I'm not going to rake up the past, either. I know your temper—you wasp! Your sting is sharp, but I am fond of you, for I loved your mother. Well, what do you say? Leave them all and come away with me! You have nowhere to go. And it's indecent for you to stay with them now. Wait," Babushka interrupted Paulina, who was about to reply, "I haven't finished. I ask nothing of you. You know my house in Moscow—it's a palace. You can occupy a whole floor, and you needn't come near me for weeks at a time, if you don't like my temper. Well, which is it to be—yes or no?"

"Allow me first to ask—are you really going away immediately?"

"D'you think I'm joking, miss? I said I would and I will. I lost fifteen thousand rubles at your thrice-accursed roulette today. Five years ago I promised to rebuild the wooden church on my Moscow estate in stone, and instead, I have squandered my money. Now I'm going back to build the church."

"And the waters, Babushka? You came to take the waters, you know."

"You and your waters! Don't annoy me, Praskovya! Are you doing it on purpose? Are you coming with me—yes or no?"

"I am very grateful to you, Babushka," began Paulina with feeling, "very, very grateful for offering me a home. You have partly guessed at my position. I am so grateful to you that, believe me, I will come to you, and perhaps very soon. But there are reasons—important ones—and I cannot decide offhand, this minute. If you would only stay a week or two longer—"

"It means you won't?"

"It means I can't. And anyhow I couldn't leave my brother and sister, and since—since—it really might happen that they would be left behind—abandoned—if—if you will take me with the little ones, Babushka, then, of course, I will come to you. And believe me, I shall not show myself ungrateful," she added warmly. "But I can't come without the children, Babushka."

"No grizzling, now! (Paulina was not dreaming of grizzling, she never cried.) There'll be room for your chicks, too. My poultry-pen is a large one. Besides it's time for them to go to school. So you're not coming now? Look out, Praskovya, I meant it for your own good; you see, I know why you won't come! I know everything, Praskovya! That Frenchie will lead to no good for you."

Paulina flushed. I myself gave a start. (Everyone knows! I seem to be the only one who knows nothing!)

"Don't frown! I shan't nag you! But mind you come to no harm! You're a clever lass, I should be sorry if you did. Well, that'll do, I'm sick of the whole lot of you! Off with you, good-bye!"

"I'll come and see you off, Babushka," said Paulina.

"No, don't, you'll only be in the way! None of you can leave me alone."

Paulina kissed Babushka's hand, but Babushka tore her hand away and kissed Paulina on the cheek.

As she passed, Paulina cast me a rapid glance and looked away.

"Good-bye to you, too, Alexei Ivanich! There's only an hour till the train leaves. I suppose I've worn you out. Here, take these fifty gold coins."

"Thanking you humbly, Babushka, but I don't like..."

"Now, now," cried Babushka with such vehemence that I dared not refuse and took the money.

"If you don't find yourself a place when you get to Moscow—come to me. I'll find you something. And now be off!"

I went to my room and lay down on the bed. I must have lain on my back about half an hour with my hands behind my head. The catastrophe had come, and I had plenty to think about. I determined to insist on a talk with Paulina the next day. Ha! The Frenchie! So it was true. But what could it amount to, after all! Paulina and de Grief! Heavens, what a pair!"

It was all simply incredible. Suddenly I leaped up, quite beside myself, resolved to go immediately and look for Mr. Astley and force him at all costs to speak. He, too, of course knows more than I do. Mr. Astley? Another enigma for me.

But there was a knock at the door. I looked up—it was Potapich.

"Sir! Alexei Ivanich! The mistress wants to see you!"

"What's the matter? Is she leaving? The train will be leaving in twenty minutes."

"She's agitated, sir, she can hardly stay in one place. 'Quick, quick,'—she means you, sir. For Christ's sake, do not delay!"

I ran downstairs immediately. Babushka had already been taken out into the corridor. She held her pocket-book in her hands.

"Go in front, let's go—"

"Where, Babushka?"

"I'll win it back, if it kills me! Come on now, march, no questions! They play there till midnight, don't they?"

I was stunned, but after a moment's thought, made up my mind.

"Very sorry, Antonida Vasilyevna, but I can't go."

"Why not? Now, what's the matter? Have you all gone stark mad?"

"Very sorry. I should reproach myself afterwards. I will not go! I will be neither a witness nor a conniver. Excuse me, Antonida Vasilyevna! Here are your fifty friedrichsdors, take them. Good-bye!" And placing the roll of friedrichsdors on a little table near Babushka's bath-chair, I bowed and went away.

"What rubbish!" Babushka shouted after me. "Don't go, if you don't want to, I can find the way myself. Potapich, come with me! Now then, lift me up, carry me!"

Not finding Mr. Astley, I went home again. Quite late, after midnight, I learned from Potapich how Babushka's day had ended. She had lost all that I had changed for her, that is to say, in our money, ten thousand rubles. The Pole to whom she had a short time ago given two friedrichsdors had taken her under his wing, and guided her play all the time. At first, before the Pole turned up, she had tried making Potapich stake, but soon drove him away. And then the Pole bobbed up. Fortunately he understood Russian and even spoke a little, a mixture of three languages, so that they could more or less understand one another. "Babushka abused him ruthlessly the whole time and although he kissed the hem of her garment, he could not be compared to you, Alexei Ivanich," said Potapich. "She treated you as if you were a gentleman, but that one, I saw with my own eyes, may the Lord strike me dead if I didn't, how he stole her money straight from the table. She caught him herself a couple of times and how she lashed him with her tongue, the words she used, sir, she even pulled his hair once, it's the truth I'm telling you, and made everyone laugh. She lost everything, sir, everything she had, all the money you changed for her! We've brought her back here—she only asked for a drink of water, and crossed herself and went to bed. She must have worn herself out, for she fell asleep at once. God send her angel's dreams! Oh, these foreign parts!" concluded Potapich. "I said it would come to no

good. The sooner we get back to our Moscow the better. Haven't we got everything in Moscow? A garden, flowers, such as you don't see here, fragrance, apple-trees, space. But no—she must go abroad! Eh, dearie me!”

CHAPTER XIII

Almost a whole month has passed without my having so much as looked at these notes of mine, begun under the influence of impressions which, though baffling, were nevertheless extremely vivid. The catastrophe I had foreseen at the time, really did come to a head, but a hundred times more violently and suddenly than I had expected. It was a strange, hideous, even a tragic affair—at least it was for me. I underwent certain experiences that might almost be said to verge upon the miraculous! At any rate that is the way in which I still regard them, although from another point of view, and considering the vortex into which I then plunged, they were merely a little out of the ordinary. But most extraordinarily of all for me was my own attitude to these events. To this day I cannot understand myself! It has passed like a dream—even my passion; it had been violent and true enough, and where is it now? The thought actually flashes through my mind now and then: perhaps I went mad and was all that time in a lunatic asylum, or perhaps I am still there—perhaps it all only seemed to happen, perhaps even now it is all only seeming—

I have gathered up my notes and read them through. (Who knows, perhaps I did this to assure myself they were not written in a lunatic asylum?) Now I am quite, quite alone. Autumn has set in, the leaves are turning yellow.

And here I am in this dreary little town (and, oh, how dreary little German towns can be!), and instead of con-

sidering my next step, I yield myself to fleeting sensations, recent memories, to that vortex which caught me up in its whirlwind, and set me down again, God knows where. It sometimes seems to me that I am still in the vortex and that any minute the storm will race by, catching me up on its wings, and then I shall again lose all sense of order and proportion and go round and round and round....

Perhaps it will help me to stop going round and round, to settle down, if I relate as accurately as possible all the adventures of this month. Once more I feel the urge to pick up my pen. Besides there are many evenings when I have nothing whatever to do. It's a funny thing, but simply for the sake of doing something, I get from the wretched circulating library here the novels of Paul de Kock (in German!) which I can hardly bear, and read them, wondering at myself the while. I seem to be afraid to read anything serious, or by any serious occupation to break the spell of what has just passed. One might think this hideous dream and all the impressions arising from it were so precious to me that I am even afraid to examine them, lest they should all disappear in smoke. Is it really all so precious to me? Why, yes, of course it is! Forty years later I may still be remembering it!...

And so I will go on writing. Now I suppose it can all be told rather more briefly—the impressions are no longer so strong—

In the first place, to be done with Babushka. The next day she lost everything she had. It was bound to be so. People of her sort who stumble into this path are bound to fly downwards faster and faster, as if from the top of a toboggan slide. She played all day till eight in the evening. I was not there and only know about it by hearsay.

Potapich stood at her side all day in the Kursaal. The Poles guiding Babushka relieved one another several

times. She began by driving away the first Pole, the one whose hair she had pulled the day before, and taking on another, but the other turned out to be even worse. Driving him away and taking back the first, who had not gone away but had bustled about in the neighbourhood of her bath-chair throughout his exile, continually thrusting his head towards her, she at last fell into real desperation. The second Pole, too, refused to leave after his eviction from his post—one sat at her right, the other at her left. They quarrelled and abused one another about the stakes the whole time, calling each other all manner of names in Polish, then making it up again, flinging down money without the slightest system. When they quarrelled, each put down the stakes on his own side, one, say, on the red, the other, on the black. It ended in futile fussing and in their so upsetting Babushka that she went almost in tears to the old croupier begging him to protect her and have them turned out. They were turned out immediately, despite their cries and protests, both shouting together, declaring that Babushka owed them money, that she had in some way deceived them, treated them dishonourably, basely. Poor old Potapich related all this to me in tears the same evening, after the final losses, vowing that they had crammed their pockets with money, that he had himself seen how shamelessly they had stolen, every minute putting money in their pockets. One of them, for instance, demanded five friedrichsdors for his trouble, and immediately put them on the roulette wheel, side by side with Babushka's stake. Babushka won, and he cried that his stake had won, and Babushka's lost. When they were turned out, Potapich came forward with the information that their pockets were full of gold. Babushka immediately asked the croupier to have it seen to, and despite the protests of the two Poles (who behaved just like two cocks pounced upon by unknown hands) the police appeared and their pockets were immediately emptied in Babush-

ka's favour. So long as she did not lose, Babushka enjoyed obvious authority all that day in the eyes of the croupiers and the whole management of the Kursaal. Her fame gradually spread throughout the town. All the visitors to the resort, of all nationalities, from the highest to the lowest, poured in to see "*une vieille Comtesse Russe, tombée en enfance*" who had already lost "several millions."

But Babushka gained very little in getting rid of the two Poles. A third Pole who spoke perfect Russian and was dressed like a gentleman, though there was something of the lackey about him, and who had a huge moustache and immense hauteur, immediately offered his services in their stead. He, too, kissed the soles of Madame's feet and kissed the hem of her garment, treating those around him arrogantly, issuing despotic orders, in a word immediately putting himself on the footing, not of Babushka's servant, but of her master. Every minute, after every turn of the wheel, he swore to her with terrible oaths that he was a Polish gentleman and that he would not take a single farthing of her money. He repeated these oaths so frequently that Babushka finally took fright. But since the Polish gentleman at first really did seem to have improved her luck, and she began to win, Babushka could not bring herself to give him up. An hour later the two first Poles, who had been turned out of the Kursaal, again appeared behind Babushka's chair, again offering their services, if only for running errands.

Potapich was ready to take his oath that the third "Polish gentleman" exchanged winks with them and even handed them something. Since Babushka had not dined, and had hardly left her chair, one of the Poles really did come in handy: he ran to the Kursaal restaurant, which was just next door, and got her a cup of bouillon, and afterwards some tea. They both ran, as a matter of fact. But by the end of the day, when it had become clear to

all that she was losing her last banknotes, there were as many as six Poles never before seen or heard of standing behind her chair. But when Babushka was in the act of losing her last penny, not only did none of them pay any heed to her, they did not even notice her, leaning right over her to the table, picking up the money, giving orders, staking, arguing and shouting, addressing the first Polish gentleman with the utmost familiarity, while he himself seemed to have forgotten Babushka's very existence. Even when Babushka, having lost everything, returned at eight o'clock to the hotel, there were three or four Poles who could not bear to leave her, and ran beside her chair on either side, shouting at the top of their voices, and babbling ceaselessly that Babushka had cheated them and must pay them back. This went on all the way to the hotel, when they were sent packing.

According to Potapich's calculations, Babushka lost altogether ninety thousand rubles that day, in excess of the money lost the day before. She changed one after another all the notes she had on her—five per cent, internal loans, securities. I was going to express my astonishment at her having been able, throughout these seven or eight hours, to sit in her chair scarcely leaving the table, but Potapich told me that she really had begun to win three times. And with hope instilled in her again she could not go away. Gamblers know very well how a person can sit in the same place almost all day and all night keeping an eye on the piles to right and left.

In the meanwhile most important events had been taking place in the hotel. From the very morning, up till eleven o'clock, when Babushka was still in her suite, our friends, that is to say, the General and de Grie, had made up their minds to take one last step. On learning that Babushka was not thinking of leaving, but, on the contrary, intended to go to the Kursaal again, they went in a body (all excepting Paulina) to have a final, absolutely *frank*,

talk with her. The General, shaking in his shoes at the thought of the appalling consequences for himself, overdid things somewhat. After half an hour of entreaties and prayers, even going so far as to admit everything, that is to say, all his debts and his passion for Mademoiselle Blanche (he lost his head completely), the General suddenly adopted a menacing tone, actually shouting and stamping his foot at Babushka. He cried that she was disgracing their family, that she was making herself the talk of the town, and, finally . . . finally: "You are disgracing a Russian name, Madame!" shouted the General. "And what do you think the police are for?" Babushka at last drove him away with her stick (a real stick). The General and de Grie took counsel once or twice again that morning, the chief point under discussion being—how to find a pretext for calling in the police. Could not they say, for instance, that the unfortunate though worthy old lady had gone mad, was gambling away her last penny, and so forth? In a word, could they not manage to get some sort of surveillance over her, or obtain some prohibition? But de Grie only shrugged his shoulders, and laughed in the face of the General, who no longer knew what he was talking about and merely chattered on as he paced up and down the floor of his sitting-room. At last, de Grie gave a wave of his hand and disappeared, where, no one knew. In the evening it was discovered that he had left the hotel for good, after a most earnest and mysterious talk with Mademoiselle Blanche. As for her, she had taken final steps that very morning. She had quite rejected the General and would not even admit him to her presence. When he ran after her to the Kursaal, and met her arm in arm with the prince, both she and Madame Veuve Cominges cut him. The prince would not acknowledge his greeting, either. The whole day Mademoiselle Blanche had been testing the prince, trying to get him to come out in the open. But alas! She was cruel-

ly out of her reckonings! This little disaster occurred that same evening. It was suddenly discovered that the prince was absolutely penniless, and had even been counting on borrowing money from her on the security of a bond, so as to play roulette. Blanche drove him away indignantly and locked herself up in her room.

That same evening I had been to Mr. Astley or I should say I had been looking for Mr. Astley the whole morning, without, however, finding him. He was neither in his rooms, at the Kursaal, or in the park. He did not dine at his hotel that day. At five o'clock I suddenly caught sight of him coming straight from the railway station to the Hotel d'Angleterre. He was in a great hurry and seemed preoccupied, although it was difficult to trace any cares, or any sort of disturbance whatever in his face. He stretched his hand out to me cordially, with his usual "Ah!" but did not stop to speak, and continued his path at a fairly rapid pace. I stuck to his side, but he found a way of answering me which somehow made it impossible to go on questioning him. Moreover, I could not bring myself to mention Paulina. He himself did not ask anything about her. I told him about Babushka. He listened gravely and shrugged his shoulders.

"She will lose everything she has," I remarked.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "I saw her on her way to the tables just before I left, and I was quite sure she would lose. If I have time I'll go to the Kursaal to watch; it is very interesting. . . ."

"Where have you been?" I cried, wondering that I had not thought of asking him this before.

"I've been to Frankfort."

"On business?"

"Yes, on business."

Well, what more could I say? Anyhow, as I was still walking beside him, he suddenly turned into the hotel "Des quatre saisons" which was on our way, bowed to me

and disappeared. On the way back to the hotel I gradually realized that I might have talked to him for two hours without finding out anything whatever because . . . after all, there was nothing for me to ask him. That's just it! There seemed to be no way in which I could have formulated my question to him.

All day Paulina either walked with the children and their nurse in the park, or stayed in the hotel. She had long been avoiding the General and scarcely spoke to him, at least on any serious subject. I had noticed that long ago. But knowing the position in which the General was today, I thought he would not be able to avoid her, in other words, there could not fail to be certain important family discussions between them. But when, on returning to the hotel after my talk with Mr. Astley, I met Paulina and the children, her face showed the utmost composure, as if all the family storms had passed her by, and her alone. She nodded to me in answer to my greeting. I went to my room thoroughly annoyed.

It is true I had been avoiding her, and had never sought her company after the incident with the Wurmurhelms. But this was partly affectation on my side. As time went on, however, genuine indignation seethed within me with ever increasing force. Even if she did not love me in the least, she had no right to trample on my feelings and receive my avowals with such contempt. After all, she knew I loved her in earnest; she herself had allowed me to speak to her about it. True, our relations had begun in rather a strange way. A long time ago, about two months—I noticed that she wanted to make a friend, a confidant of me, and that she had even begun to make certain tentative efforts in that direction. But for some reason, nothing came of it at that time. And instead there had sprung up our present strange relations. And that is why I began talking to her the way I did. But if my love is

unpleasant to her, why doesn't she forbid me outright to speak about it?

This was not forbidden to me. She herself sometimes encouraged me to talk about it, and . . . of course, she only wanted to make fun of me. I know for certain, it is my firm conviction, that she liked, after hearing me out and teasing me till it hurt, to overwhelm me with some sudden fiendish sally, in which she displayed her utter contempt and disregard for me. And yet she knows I cannot live without her. Three days have passed since the affair of the Baron and I could no longer bear our *separation*. When I met her near the Kursaal my heart beat so that I turned pale. And she can't get on without me, either. She needs me, and surely, surely, not merely as a kind of court jester!

She has a secret—that is clear. Her talk with Babushka was a stab at my heart. I had challenged her a thousand times to be frank with me, and she knew I really was ready to lay down my life for her. But she always put me off with something like contempt or, instead of the sacrifice of my life which I offered her, demanded of me pranks like the one with the Baron. Isn't that outrageous! Can it be that the Frenchman is all the world to her? And Mr. Astley? I could make neither head nor tail of it all, and yet—heavens, how I suffered!

Back at the hotel, I picked up my pen in a sort of frenzy and scrawled her the following lines:

"Paulina Alexandrovna, I see clearly that a *dénouement* had arrived which is bound to affect you, too. I ask you for the last time—do you or do you not need my life? If you do, in any way whatever, say the word, I shall be in my room for the present, most of the time at least, and shall go nowhere. If you need me, write to me or send for me."

I sealed this note and dispatched it with the corridor attendant, telling him to deliver it into her hands. I did

not expect an answer, but a few minutes later the man came back with the message that the lady sent her compliments.

About seven o'clock I was summoned to the General.

He was in his sitting-room, dressed as if ready to go out. His hat and stick lay on the sofa. When I came in, it seemed to me that he was standing in the middle of the room with his legs far apart and his head drooping, talking to himself. But as soon as he caught sight of me he rushed up to me with a sort of shout, so that I stepped back involuntarily and made as if to run away; but he seized me by both hands and dragged me to the sofa. He sat down on the sofa himself and made me take a chair exactly opposite him, and, not letting go of my hands, with trembling lips, with sudden tears gleaming on his eyelashes, said in imploring tones:

"Alexei Ivanich, save me, save me, take pity on me!"

For a long time I could understand nothing. He kept repeating over and over again: "Have pity, have pity!" At last I realized that he expected something in the form of advice from me, or rather, abandoned by all, in grief and anxiety, he had bethought himself of me and sent for me just to talk, talk, talk.

He seemed to be crazed, or at least to be in a state of extreme bewilderment. He clasped his hands and was ready to throw himself on his knees before me if I would only—what do you think?—go at once to Mademoiselle Blanche and implore her, work on her to come back to him, to marry him!

"Why, General!" I cried. "Mademoiselle Blanche probably hardly realizes the fact of my existence! What can *I* do?"

But it was no good objecting, he did not understand what was said to him. He started talking about Babushka, but quite wildly. He still stuck to the idea of sending for the police.

"At home, at home," he began, in a sudden burst of indignation, "at home, in a word, in a well-regulated State, where there are authorities, guardians would immediately be set over an old woman like that. Yes, my dear sir, yes," he continued, suddenly falling into an admonitory style, jumping up and pacing the room, "you don't know that yet, my dear sir—" he seemed to be addressing some imagined "dear sir" in the corner—"but you will . . . yes . . . we know how to deal with old women at home, I assure you . . . oh, God!"

He flung himself down on the sofa again, and a minute later, almost in tears, gasping, he hastened to tell me that Mademoiselle Blanche would not marry him because Babushka herself had arrived instead of a telegram, and it was now quite clear that he would receive no inheritance. He seemed to think I knew nothing about it. I tried to say something about de Grie, but he silenced me with a wave of his hand.

"Gone! All my property is mortgaged to him. I am completely penniless. The money you brought . . . that money—I don't know how much—I think there are seven hundred francs left over—well, that's all I have left. When it's gone—oh, I don't know, I don't know. . . ."

"How will you pay the hotel bills?" I cried in alarm. "And—and then—"

He looked thoughtful but seemed not to have understood, perhaps he did not even hear what I said. I tried to speak about Paulina Alexandrovna, and the children. He replied with a hasty "Yes, yes!" but started again about the prince, saying that now he would go away with Blanche and then—"And then what am I to do, Alexei Ivanich?" he cried, suddenly turning to me. "For God's sake, what am I to do? Tell me that! It's ingratitude, rank ingratitude, isn't it?"

He ended by fairly melting into tears.

There was nothing to be done with such a man. And to leave him alone would be dangerous, too. Anything might happen to him. I got away from him somehow, but I told the nurse to go and see him every now and then, and spoke to the corridor attendant, who seemed to be an intelligent youth. He, too, promised to look in now and again.

Hardly had I left the General when Potapich came to me with a summons from Babushka. It was eight o'clock, and she had only just returned from the tables, after her final losses. I went to her room. The old woman was seated in her chair in a state of utter exhaustion, apparently quite ill. Marfa was giving her a cup of tea which she had almost to force her to drink. There was a striking change in her voice and manner.

"Good evening, sir, good evening, Alexei Ivanich," she said, with a slow dignified bend of her head. "Forgive me for troubling you again, you will bear with an old woman, I'm sure. I left almost a hundred thousand rubles there, sir. You were right not to go with me yesterday. Now I have no money, not a farthing. I don't want to delay a moment, I shall leave at half past nine. I've sent for your Englishman—Astley, is he?—I want to ask him to lend me three thousand francs for a week. I want you to persuade him, so that he shouldn't get any ideas into his head, and refuse. I'm still fairly rich, sir, I have three villages and two houses over there. Yes, and there's still some money left, I didn't bring it all with me. I tell you this so that he need have no doubts. . . . Ah, here he is. You can see he's a nice man."

Mr. Astley hastened to Babushka at her first summons. Without pausing for a moment's thought and with scarcely a word, he immediately counted her out three thousand francs, against a bond which Babushka signed. Having done which he bowed and hastened away.

"And now you go, too, Alexei Ivanich. There's only a little over an hour left, I want to lie down for a little, my bones ache. Don't be angry with a poor old fool! I will never again accuse young folks of frivolity, yes, and that wretched General of yours, it would be a sin for me to blame even him. I'm certainly not going to give him any money, which is what he wants, for I consider him an utter imbecile, but I, myself, old fool that I am, am no better. It's quite true—God punishes the stiff-necked, however old they may be. Well, good-bye! Lift me out, Marfa."

But I was determined to see her off. I was in a state of expectation, and kept thinking something would happen any minute. I could not stay in my room. I kept going out into the passage, even went out to walk in the avenue for a minute. My letter to her had been clear and resolute, and the present catastrophe was of course final. In the hotel I heard of de Grie's departure. Who knows—if she rejects me as a friend, perhaps she will not reject me as her servant. For she does need me, if only to run her errands.

When the time came for the train to leave I ran down to the platform and put Babushka into the carriage. She had taken a compartment all to herself. "Thank you, sir, for your disinterested sympathy," she said, taking leave of me. "And remind Praskovya of what I told her yesterday—I shall be expecting her."

I went back to the hotel. Passing the General's suite I met the nurse and inquired after the General. "Oh, sir, he's all right, sir," she replied drearily. I went in, however, but stopped in the doorway of the sitting-room in utter astonishment. Mademoiselle Blanche and the General were laughing heartily. La Veuve Cominges was there, too, seated on the sofa. The General was obviously beside himself with joy, prattling all sorts of nonsense, and giving long, nervous laughs, which broke

his whole face into innumerable wrinkles, so that his eyes seemed to disappear. Afterwards I learned, from Blanche herself, that, having driven away the Russian prince, she heard of the General's despair, and took it into her head to look in and console him. But the poor General did not know that his fate was already sealed and that Blanche had already begun to pack, and would be speeding on her way to Paris by an early train the next morning.

After standing for a moment on the threshold of the General's sitting-room, I decided not to go in, after all, but to retreat unnoticed. I mounted the stairs to my own room and as soon as I opened the door I noticed in the dusk a figure seated beside the window. Whoever it was did not rise at my entrance. I went quickly up to the figure, and looked—my breath was taken away. It was Paulina!

CHAPTER XIV

I gave a cry.

"Well? What's the matter?" she said in a strange voice. She was pale and morose-looking.

"The matter? You here—in my room!"

"When I do a thing, I *mean* it—that's the sort of person I am. You'll soon see that. Light the candle."

I obeyed. She rose, went to the table, and placed an unsealed letter before me.

"Read it!" she commanded.

"It's—it's de Grie's handwriting!" I cried, seizing the letter. My hands shook and the lines jumped up and down before my eyes. I have forgotten the exact wording of the letter, but here it is—if not word for word, at least thought for thought.

"Mademoiselle," wrote de Grie, "untoward circumstances compel me to leave immediately. You have your-

self of course remarked that I have purposely avoided a final explanation with you until all the circumstances have been elucidated. The arrival of your old relative (*de la vieille dame*) and her absurd behaviour has put an end to all my doubts. The disordered state of my own affairs finally prevents me from indulging further in the captivating hopes which I have for some time allowed myself to cherish. I regret the past, but trust that you will not find in my own behaviour anything unworthy of a gentleman and a man of honour (*gentilhomme et honnête homme*). Having lost almost all my money in unpaid loans to your stepfather I am compelled by extreme necessity to make the best use of what is left to me. I have already written to my friends in Petersburg to see to the sale of my mortgages on the property. Having however become aware that your reckless stepfather has spent your own money, I have decided to let him off the fifty thousand francs, and return him deeds to that amount, so that you will now be in a position to get back what you have lost, demanding it from him by law. I trust, mademoiselle, that in the present state of affairs my act will be extremely advantageous to yourself. I also trust that by this act I am fulfilling the obligation of an honourable and magnanimous person. Rest assured that the memory of you is stamped for ever on my heart."

"Well, everything's quite clear," I said, turning to Paulina. "Do you mean to say you ever expected anything else?" I added with indignation.

"I expected nothing," she replied, apparently quite calmly, though I thought I caught a slight tremor in her voice. "I made up my mind long ago. I read his thoughts and knew what he was thinking. He thought I would try . . . would insist . . ." (She broke off without finishing the sentence, biting her lip in silence.) "I purposely exaggerated my contempt for him," she began again. "I wanted to see what he would do. If a telegram about the

inheritance had come, I would have flung that idiot's (my stepfather's) debt in his face and driven him away. I've detested him for ages and ages. He was so different once, so very different! Oh, with what joy I would throw those fifty thousand rubles in his vile face now, and spit at it ... and rub the spit in."

"But the document—the deed for the fifty thousand—the General must have it. Take it and give it to de Grie."

"Oh, it wouldn't be the same, it wouldn't!"

"Of course, of course, it's not that! And what good is the General now? And Babushka?" I cried suddenly.

Paulina looked at me with a kind of absent-minded impatience.

"What has Babushka got to do with it?" she said, "I can't go to her ... and I don't intend to apologize to anyone, either," she added irritably.

"What's to be done?" I cried. "How could you, how ever could you have loved de Grie? That scoundrel! Well, do you want me to call him out and kill him? Where is he now?"

"He is in Frankfort, he will be there three days."

"Only say the word and I will go there tomorrow by the first train," I cried, in a kind of foolish ecstasy.

She laughed.

"What then? He would probably say: first give me back the fifty thousand francs. And why should he meet you in a duel? What nonsense!"

"But where, where are we to find those fifty thousand francs?" I repeated, gnashing my teeth, as if I imagined the money was lying about on the floor somewhere. Then I turned to her, the germ of a strange idea forming in my mind: "I say—what about Mr. Astley?" I cried.

Her eyes gleamed.

"What! Dost thou—*thou*—want me to leave thee for that Englishman?" she said, looking searchingly into my

face and smiling wryly. It was the first time she had said "thou" to me.

And all of a sudden, overcome by agitation, she sank on to the sofa, as if her strength had failed her.

A thought flashed like lightning through my brain. I stood there hardly able to believe my eyes, my ears. Why, then, it must be that she loves me! She came to me and not to Mr. Astley! She, a young girl, had come to me in my room, in a hotel—thus compromising herself publicly—and I, I stood before her, unable as yet to understand.

A wild thought sprang into my mind.

"Paulina! Give me only one hour! Wait here only one hour and . . . I will come back! You . . . you simply must. You'll see! Don't go away—please!"

And I rushed out of the room, heedless of her astonished, questioning gaze. She called to me, but I did not go back.

Yes, sometimes the wildest idea, an idea that at first sight seems utterly impossible, gets so firmly established in one's mind that one ends by regarding it as feasible. . . . More—if the idea connects itself with a strong, passionate desire, then one may even accept it as something fateful, essential, inevitable, something that is bound to come into existence, bound to happen. It may be that some combination of presentiments, some remarkable strength of will, the intoxication brewed from one's own imagination, or goodness knows what, I'm sure I don't, is involved. At any rate that evening, which I shall never forget as long as I live, a marvellous thing happened to me. And although there is doubtless a perfectly logical explanation of it, there still seems to me, even now, to have been something miraculous about it. And why, oh why, had that certainty taken such a strong deep root in me, beginning from such a long time ago? No doubt I had long been thinking of it, I repeat, and, I

repeat, not as of something which might, among other things, happen (and therefore might equally well not happen), but as of a thing which could not possibly fail to happen!

It was a quarter past ten; I went to the Kursaal full of sanguine expectations and at the same time more excited than I had ever been in my life. There were still a good many people in the gambling halls, though not half as many as there had been in the morning.

By eleven o'clock in the evening only the real, desperate gamblers remain at the tables, those for whom nothing but roulette exists at a spa, who have come for nothing else, who scarcely notice what is going on around them, and take no interest in anything else throughout the season, who do nothing but play from morning to night, and would probably be willing to play till dawn if this were possible. They always disperse in vexation when the halls close at midnight. And when the senior croupier announces just before closing time, about twelve o'clock: "*Les trois derniers coups, messieurs!*" they are sometimes ready to stake on these last rounds all they have in their pockets—and it is precisely then that the greatest losses are incurred. I made for the table where Babushka had sat a short time before. It was not very crowded, and I was soon able to stand at the table itself. Right in front of me on the green baize the word "*passe*" was chalked.

"*Passe*" is the row of numbers from nineteen to thirty-six inclusive. The first row, one to eighteen inclusive, is called "*Manque*"; but what was that to me? I made absolutely no calculations, I did not even hear the number at which the last spin had stopped, and made no attempt to find out what had been before beginning to play, as any gambler with the slightest powers of calculation would have done. I took out all my twenty friedrichsdors and threw them on the *passe* before me.

"*Vingt deux!*" cried the croupier.

I won and again staked my all—the original sum and my winnings.

"*Trente et un!*" cried the croupier. Again I had won! So now I had eighty friedrichsdors. I put the whole eighty on the twelve middle numbers—treble winnings. Only two chances against me—the wheel rotated, and stopped at twenty-four. I was handed three rouleaux of fifty friedrichsdors and ten gold coins. Altogether, with the original sum, I had two hundred friedrichsdors.

In a kind of fever I shoved the whole pile on to the red—and then suddenly came to myself! And for the only time during the whole evening, the whole time I was playing, fear cast its chill over me, and my limbs trembled. I realized with horror all of a sudden what it would mean to me to lose now! I had staked my whole life on the wheel!

"*Rouge!*" cried the croupier, and I caught my breath, my body tingling with excitement. I was paid in bank-notes; altogether they must have come to four thousand florins and eighty friedrichsdors. I was still in a condition to reckon it up.

Then, as I remember, I staked two thousand florins again on twelve middle numbers, and lost; staked my gold and eighty friedrichsdors and lost. I was in a frenzy. I snatched at the last two thousand florins left to me and put them on the twelve first—without thinking, just as it came. I did, by the way, have one moment of suspense, perhaps like that—to compare one sensation with quite a different one—felt by Madame Blanchard in Paris when she jumped out of a balloon.

"*Quatre!*" cried the croupier. Altogether, counting the original sum, I again had six thousand florins. Now I bore myself like a victor, there was nothing—nothing—that I feared, and I threw down four thousand florins on the black. Ten people followed suit, and staked on the

black. The croupiers exchanged glances and whispers. Everyone was talking and waiting.

Black came round. I no longer remember either the amount or the order of my stakes. I only remember, as in a dream, that I had already won something like sixteen thousand florins. Suddenly, in three unlucky spins, I lost twelve of them. Then I put the last four thousand on *passe*, this time hardly feeling anything. I just waited, as it were mechanically, not thinking, and won again. Then I won four times running again. All I can remember is that I raked up the money by thousands, that the twelve middle numbers came round oftener than any other and that I stuck to them. They seemed to turn up regularly, three or four times running, then disappeared for two spins, and again came round once each three or four times. Such remarkable regularity may be observed every now and then, and it is this which ruins inveterate gamblers, calculating with pencils in their hands. The strangest quirks of fate may be witnessed within these walls!

I do not think more than half an hour had passed since my arrival. Suddenly the croupier informed me that I had won thirty thousand florins, and since the bank would not answer for more at one time, the roulette would be closed till the morrow. I scraped up all my gold, pouring it into my pockets, gathered up the notes, and immediately went to a table in the next hall, where there was another roulette. The whole crowd trooped after me. A place was cleared for me immediately and I began putting down my stakes again, neither calculating nor counting. What saved me, I cannot imagine!

Occasionally, it is true, certain calculations would flash through my brain. I took a fancy to this or that chance number, but soon gave it up, and again put down my money almost unconsciously. I must have been exceedingly absent-minded, I remember the croupiers several

times corrected my play. I made gross mistakes. My temples were wringing wet, and my hands shook. Several Poles came up to me with offers of their services, but I heeded nobody. My luck did not fail me. Suddenly loud cries and laughter broke out. "Bravo, bravo!" shouted everyone. Some actually applauded. Here, too, I had grabbed thirty thousand florins and the bank had to close till the next day.

"Go! Go!" a voice from the right whispered in my ear. It belonged to a Frankfort Jew; he had stood beside me all the time, and I seem to remember he had now and then advised me how to play.

"For God's sake, go!" whispered another voice, this time in my left ear. I glanced round hastily. The speaker was an extremely modestly and decently dressed lady, under thirty years of age, with a sickly pallor on her exhausted face, which even now bore traces of exquisite former beauty. I happened to be stuffing my pocket with banknotes, crumpling them up anyhow, and gathering the remains of the gold from the table. Picking up the last rouleau of fifty friedrichsdors I succeeded in thrusting it quite unnoticed into the pale lady's hand. It was the irresistible impulse of a moment and I can still remember how warmly her slender fingers pressed my hand in token of lively gratitude. All this only took a few seconds.

Having gathered up my gains, I changed over hastily to *trente et quarante*.

The *trente et quarante* tables attract an aristocratic public. Here is no roulette wheel, only cards. Here the bank answers for a hundred thousand thalers at a time. Here, too, the highest stake is four thousand florins. I knew nothing about the game, hardly knew a single stake except red and black, which prevailed here, too. I decided to stick to these. The whole casino crowded round. I cannot remember whether I so much

as thought of Paulina once the whole time. I was completely absorbed in the irrepressible joy of seizing and raking in the banknotes piling up ever higher in front of me.

It really was as if fate had given me a nudge. Just then, as if according to some plan, a situation which is by the way not uncommon in this game arose. The luck, for example, sticks to the red, not abandoning it for ten or even fifteen times running. Only the day before yesterday I had heard that red had turned up twenty-two times running a week ago. This was unheard of, even at roulette, and was related with astonishment. Naturally almost everyone abandoned the red, and for another ten games hardly anyone ventured to stake on it. But no experienced gambler would stake on the black, the opposite of red, either. An experienced gambler knows what these "capricious cases" mean. It would seem, for instance, that after the sixteenth appearance of the red, the seventeenth would almost certainly be black. Novices act accordingly in droves, doubling and trebling their stakes, and incurring terrific losses.

But I, having noticed that by some odd quirk the red had turned up seven times running, decided to stick to it. I believe it was half vanity on my part. I wanted to impress the onlookers by the crazy risk I was taking, and—oh, strange sensation!—I can distinctly remember that now without the slightest urge of vanity I was seized by a mad thirst for risk. It may be that the mind, having undergone a variety of sensations, is not sated, but merely stimulated by them, and demands still more sensations, ever stronger and stronger, till it is finally exhausted. I am quite sure that if the regulations had permitted stakes of fifty thousand florins at a time I would certainly have taken the risk. All around there were exclamations that this was madness, that the red had already come round fourteen times running!

"Monsieur a gagné déjà cent mille florins," said a voice beside me.

I suddenly came to my senses. What? Had I won a hundred thousand florins that night? What need had I for more? I flung myself upon the banknotes, stuffed them into my pocket without counting them, raked up all my gold coins and rouleaux, and rushed out of the building. I passed through the halls amidst general laughter, everyone looking at my bulging pockets and the uneven gait caused by the weight of the gold. It must have come to over sixteen pounds. Several hands were extended towards me. I gave money away in fistfuls, as much as I could grasp at a time. Two Jews stopped me at the exit.

"You are bold, you are very bold," they said, "but tomorrow morning you must go away, as early as possible, or else you will lose it all."

I paid no heed to them. It was so dark in the avenue that I could not see my hand before me. The distance to the hotel was about half a mile. I have never been afraid of thieves or highwaymen, even when I was a little boy, and I did not think about them now, either. I really cannot remember what I did think about on the way. I had no thoughts at all. I felt nothing but intense joy—the joy of success, victory, power, I scarcely know how to give it a name. The image of Paulina did flash through my mind, though. I realized that I was going to her, that I would be with her in a few minutes, would tell her everything, show her. . . . But I scarcely remembered what it was she had said to me and why I had left her; and all the sensations experienced less than an hour and a half ago now seemed to belong to the remote past, to be cancelled, out-of-date, never to be thought of again, for now everything would begin anew. I had almost got to the end of the avenue when I was suddenly seized with fear. What if I am killed and robbed this very mo-

ment? With every step my fears were redoubled. I almost ran. And then, at the end of the avenue our hotel blazed out with its innumerable lights—thank God!—home at last!

I ran up to my landing and flung the door open. Paulina was still there, seated on my sofa with a lighted candle before her, her arms folded. She stared at me in astonishment, and indeed I must have presented rather a strange sight at that moment. I halted before her and began throwing my burden of money on to the table.

CHAPTER XV

I remember how steadily she looked into my face, without moving from her seat, without even changing her position.

"I have won two hundred thousand francs!" I cried, throwing down the last rouleau. The huge pile of banknotes and rouleaux of gold covered the whole table. I could not tear my eyes away from it. Every now and then, I forgot all about Paulina for the space of a minute or two, and gave myself up to sorting the banknotes, and making them into bundles, breaking off now and then to gather the gold into a single pile, or leaving it all, to pace the room with rapid steps, plunged in thought, only to go back to the table and once more begin counting the money. All of a sudden, as if struck by a thought, I rushed to the door, and hastily turned the key twice in the lock. Then I stood thoughtfully before my little valise.

"Perhaps I'd better put it all in the valise till tomorrow," I said, and suddenly turned to Paulina, remembering that she was there. She was sitting motionless, in the same place, but her eyes followed me all the time. There was a very strange expression on her face, and

I didn't like it at all. It seemed to me that there was something akin to hatred in it.

I went up to her with rapid strides.

"Paulina, here are twenty-five thousand florins, that's fifty thousand francs, if not more. Take it and throw it in his face tomorrow."

She did not reply.

"If you like, I'll take it myself, first thing in the morning. Shall I?"

She burst out laughing. And she went on laughing for a long time.

I looked at her in mingled amazement and grief. This laughter was very like the mocking peals at my expense with which she had lately so often greeted my most passionate declarations. At last she stopped laughing and frowned. She looked at me severely from under her brows.

"I don't want your money," she said scornfully.

"What? What's that you say?" I cried. "Why not, Paulina?"

"I don't take money for nothing."

"I offer it to you as a friend. I offer you my life."

She looked at me long and searchingly as if trying to see through me.

"You are paying dear," she said with a wry smile. "The mistress of de Grie isn't worth fifty thousand francs."

"Paulina, how can you talk to me like that!" I cried reproachfully. "Do you take me for de Grie?"

"I hate you! Yes, I do! I hate you just as much as I hate de Grie!" she cried, her eyes suddenly gleaming.

Then she covered her face with her hands and went into hysterics. I rushed up to her.

I guessed that something must have happened to her in my absence. She seemed to have gone completely out of her mind.

"Go on, buy me! Buy me—do! For fifty thousand francs, like de Grief!" burst from her between convulsive sobs. I embraced her, kissed her hands, her feet, fell on my knees before her.

The hysterical fit passed. She put her hands on my shoulders and looked searchingly at me. She seemed to want to read something on my face. She listened to me, but apparently did not hear what I was saying. A look of anxiety and thoughtfulness appeared on her face. I was afraid for her, I felt sure she was going mad. And then all of a sudden she drew me gently towards her. But just as a confiding smile began to steal over her features, she pushed me away abruptly and once more took to gazing at me sombrely.

Suddenly she threw her arms round me.

"You love me, you do love me, don't you?" she said. "You—you—were ready to fight the Baron for me!" Here she burst out laughing, as if at the memory of something which was both ridiculous and adorable. She was laughing and crying together. Well, what could I do? I was in a fever myself. I remember she began saying something to me, but what it was I could hardly understand. It was a kind of delirious lisping and prattling, as if she were in a great hurry to tell me something. Then came ravings interrupted by peals of gay laughter, which began to alarm me. "But you're a darling, a darling," she kept repeating. "You are my faithful one," and again she put her hands on my shoulders, again gazed at me, repeating all the time: "You do love me, you do . . . will you always love me?" I could not take my eyes off her. Never before had I seen her in such paroxysms of tenderness and love. Of course it was mere delirium, but . . . every now and then, seeing my passionate glance, she would smile archly, and all of a sudden begin talking about Mr. Astley.

As a matter of fact she had been trying to say something about Mr. Astley all the time (especially while endeavouring a short time before to explain something to me, what exactly I had been unable to grasp). She even seemed to be laughing at him, repeating endlessly that he was waiting . . . and asking me if I knew that he was probably now standing outside the window. "Yes, yes, outside the window, go on, open it, look, look, there he is!" She pushed me towards the window but before I could get there, broke into peals of laughter and rushed into my arms. "Are we going away? We're going away tomorrow, aren't we?" Her mind suddenly concentrated anxiously on this idea. "Oh (she paused for thought), do you think we shall catch up Babushka? I think we might catch her up at Berlin. What d'you suppose she'll say when we catch her up and she sees us? And Mr. Astley? He won't throw himself from the Schlangenberg, will he? (She laughed heartily.) Listen now—d'you know where he's going next summer? He wants to go to the North Pole on a scientific expedition, and take me with him, ha, ha, ha! He says we Russians would know nothing at all but for Europeans, and we are fit for nothing . . . well—he's a good soul, too. Fancy, he stands up for 'the General,' he says Blanche . . . passion—oh, I don't know, I don't know!" she exclaimed, suddenly losing the thread of her discourse. "Poor things, I'm so sorry for them, and for Babushka. Now look here—I'm sure you're not one to kill de Grief! And did you really, really, think you would kill him? Silly boy! Did you really think I would let you fight de Grief? You wouldn't even kill the Baron, you know!" she added, with another burst of laughter. "Oh, how funny you looked that time with the Baron! I watched you both from the bench—how you hated going to him! How I laughed! How I laughed!" she added, and laughed again.

And suddenly she again took to kissing and embracing

me, again pressed her face passionately and tenderly to mine. I no longer thought about anything, heard anything. My head was going round....

I think it was about seven in the morning when I awoke. The sun was lighting up the room. Paulina was sitting next to me with a queer expression on her face, as if she had just emerged from a sort of fog, and were trying to collect her thoughts. She, too, had only just waked up, and was staring hard at the table and the money on it. My head ached, it felt very heavy. I was going to take Paulina's hand, but she pushed me away and jumped off the sofa. The opening day was misty, rain was falling before the dawn. She went over to the window, opened it, thrust out her head and shoulders, and stayed there some minutes, her chin supported on her hands, her elbows on the window-sill, without looking back at me or listening to what I was saying. I wondered in some alarm what would happen next, and how it would all end. Suddenly she turned away from the window to the table, and said, looking at me with an expression of infinite hatred, her lips trembling with rage:

"Well—now give me my fifty thousand francs!"

"Paulina—again? Again?" I began.

"Perhaps you've changed your mind? Ha! Ha! Ha! Perhaps you repent?"

The rouleaux of twenty-five thousand florins which I had set aside in the night lay on the table. I picked it up and handed it to her.

"It's mine now—it is, isn't it? Isn't it?" she asked me viciously, holding the money in her hands.

"It was always yours," said I.

"Well, then, there's your fifty thousand francs!" She raised her hand and flung the coins at me. They struck me painfully in the face and scattered over the floor. Upon this, Paulina rushed out of the room.

Of course I knew she was not herself at that moment, though I was at a loss to understand what had provoked this fit of madness. After the lapse of a month she is still ill. But what was the cause of this condition, and still more important, of this strange prank? Could it have been wounded vanity? Despair at the thought that she had actually brought herself to come to me? Could she possibly have imagined that I was gloating over my luck, and, just like de Grie after all, anxious to get rid of her by giving her fifty thousand francs. It was not so, my conscience is perfectly clear about it. I cannot help thinking it was partly her own vanity which was to blame. Her vanity prompted her not to trust me, to insult me, although she herself may not have realized this consciously. In that case I was made to answer for de Grie, and if I was perhaps to blame, it was not greatly my fault. True, all this was mere raving; true, also, I had known she was delirious and ... and had not taken this fact into consideration. Perhaps she is now unable to forgive me for this. Even so, this only accounts for her present behaviour. But before—before? After all, her delirium, her sickness were not so violent as to make her quite forget what she was doing in coming to me with de Grie's letter. She must have known what she was doing.

I hastily thrust my paper money and the heap of gold on to the mattress, covered it all with the bedclothes, and went out ten minutes after Paulina had gone. I was sure she had gone to her own room, and intended to get to the General's suite on the quiet and find out from the nurse in the hall how the young lady was. What was my astonishment when the nurse met me on the stairs and said she was coming to me to look for Paulina, who had not yet come back.

"She only left me this very moment," I told her, "only ten minutes ago, where could she have gone?"

The nurse looked at me reproachfully.

In the meantime the wildest rumours were spreading through the hotel. It was whispered in the hall porter's cubby-hole and the head waiter's room that at six in the morning the Fräulein had burst out of the hotel in the rain, and run in the direction of the Hotel d'Angleterre. From their words and hints I could see that they knew she had spent the night in my room. Obviously the affairs of everyone in the General's household had become the subject of general discussion. Everyone knew that the General had been almost out of his mind yesterday, he had bawled so loudly that the whole hotel heard him. It was also said that the old woman who had arrived at the hotel was his mother, come all the way from Russia to prevent her son's marriage to Mademoiselle de Cominges, and in case of disobedience on his part to deprive him of his inheritance, and that, since he had refused to obey her, the Countess had purposely lost all her money at roulette before his very eyes, so that nothing should be left for him. "*Diese Russen!*" exclaimed the head waiter indignantly, shaking his head. Others laughed. The head waiter prepared the bill. The news of my winnings was already common knowledge. Karl, my corridor attendant, was the first to congratulate me. But I had other things to think of. I rushed over to the Hotel d'Angleterre.

It was still early. Mr. Astley was not receiving anyone. Learning that it was I, he came out to me in the corridor and stood before me, silently fixing his leaden glance on me, and waiting for me to speak. I immediately inquired for Paulina.

"She is ill," replied Mr. Astley, still gazing steadily at me, without taking his eyes from my face.

"So she really is with you?"

"Oh, yes, she's with me."

"And what—do you intend to keep her with you?"

"Oh, yes, I do."

"Mr. Astley, this will create a scandal. It's impossible. And besides she's quite ill. Perhaps you haven't noticed."

"Oh, yes, I have noticed, I told you myself she was ill. If she were not ill she would not have spent the night with you."

"So you know that, too?"

"I know that, too. She was to have come to me last night, and I was going to take her to a female relative of mine, but, being unwell, she forgot, and went to you instead, by mistake."

"Indeed! Well, congratulations, Mr. Astley! By the way, you have put an idea into my head. Didn't you stand under our window all night? Miss Paulina kept making me open the window and look out to see if you were under her window, and she laughed a lot."

"Really? No, I did not stand under her window. But I waited in the corridor and walked round and round."

"But, Mr. Astley, she is in need of medical treatment."

"Oh, yes, I have sent for a doctor and if she dies you will answer to me for her death."

I was amazed.

"Why, Mr. Astley, what do you mean by that?"

"Well—isn't it true that you won two hundred thousand thalers yesterday?"

"Only a hundred thousand florins."

"You see! You must go to Paris this very morning."

"Why should I?"

"Whenever a Russian gets money in his pockets, he goes to Paris," explained Mr. Astley as if he were reading the words from a book.

"What should I do in Paris in the summer? I love her, Mr. Astley! You know that very well."

"Indeed? I am convinced of the contrary. Besides, by remaining here you will probably lose all you have and

will have no money to take you to Paris. But good-bye, I am sure you will go to Paris today."

"Very well—good-bye, but I shall not go to Paris. Only think, Mr. Astley, what an effect this will have on all of us! In a word, the General—and now this adventure of Miss Paulina's—it'll spread all over the town."

"Yes, all over the town. I hardly think the General is troubling about that, he has other things to think of. And Miss Paulina has a perfect right to live where she likes. As to the family it may be said with perfect justice that no such family exists any longer."

I went away, smiling at the strange certainty of this Englishman that I would go to Paris. "He will call me out and kill me, however," I pondered, "if Mademoiselle Paulina dies—here's a pretty kettle of fish!" I swear that I was sorry for Paulina, but, strange as it may appear, from the moment that I had arrived at the gambling tables the day before, and begun raking up the rouleaux of money, my love seemed to have retreated into the background. I say this now, but at the time I did not visualize it clearly. Am I then a true gambler, was my love for Paulina so—unreal? No, I love her still, God knows! And just then, as I left Mr. Astley to go to my hotel, I suffered sincerely, and blamed myself. But—but then—oh, then the most idiotic thing happened.

I was hastening to the General's suite, when suddenly, not far from his room, a door in the corridor opened and someone called me by name. It was Madame Veuve Cominges, who was calling me by order of Mademoiselle Blanche. I went into Mademoiselle Blanche's apartment.

They had a small suite of two rooms. The laughter and cries of Mademoiselle Blanche could be heard from the bedroom. She was going to get out of bed.

"*A, c'est lui! Viens donc, bêta! Is it true que tu as gagné une montagne d'or et d'argent? J'aimerais mieux d'or.*"

"Quite true," I replied, laughing.

"How much?"

"A hundred thousand florins."

"*Bibi, comme tu es bête!* Come here, I can't hear anything. *Nous ferons bombance, n'est-ce pas?*"

I went into her room. She was lolling beneath a pink satin eiderdown from which emerged her dusky, healthy, glorious shoulders—such shoulders as one only sees in a dream—scarcely concealed by a cambric chemise, trimmed with snow-white lace, which suited her dusky skin to a marvel.

"*Mon fils, as-tu du coeur?*" she exclaimed, catching sight of me, and bursting into peals of laughter. Her laughter was always extremely gay, and sometimes quite natural.

"*Tout autre—*" I began, paraphrasing Corneille.

"You see—*vois-tu,*" she chattered on, "in the first place, find me my stockings and help me on with them, and in the second place, *si tu n'es pas trop bête, je te prends à Paris.* I'm going there immediately, you know."

"Immediately?"

"In half an hour."

And indeed everything was packed. All her trunks and other luggage stood ready on the floor. Coffee had long been served.

"*Eh bien!*" If you like, *tu verras Paris. Dis donc qu'est ce que c'est qu'un outchitel? Tu étais bien bête, quand tu étais outchitel.* Where are my stockings? Put them on—d'you hear?"

She thrust out a truly admirable little foot, dusky, small, not distorted as most of those little feet which look so charming when shod usually are. I laughed and began drawing the silk stocking up her leg. Mademoiselle Blanche meanwhile sat on the side of the bed, prattling away:

"*Eh bien, que feras-tu, si je te prends avec? In the first place, je veux cinquante mille francs. You can give them to me in Frankfort. Nous allons à Paris. There we will live together et je te ferais voir des étoiles en plein jour. You will see women such as you have never before seen. Listen—*"

"Not so fast! If I give you fifty thousand francs, what will I have left for myself?"

"*Et cent cinquante mille francs, have you forgotten? Beside, I consent to live in your rooms for a month, for two, que sais-je. Of course we will spend those hundred and fifty thousand francs in two months. You see, je suis bon enfant and tell you in advance, mais tu verras des étoiles.*"

"And all in two months?"

"What? That horrifies you? *Ah, vil esclave!* Don't you know that a single month of such a life is worth your whole existence? One month—*et après le déluge! Mais tu ne peux comprendre, va!* Away with you, you're not worth it! Hey! *Que fais tu?*"

Just then I was putting the stocking on her other leg, but was unable to refrain from kissing it. She tore it away and began kicking me in the face with the tips of her toes. At last she drove me away.

"*Eh bien, mon outchitel, je t'attends, si tu veux; in a quarter of an hour I shall be gone!*" she shouted after me.

Back in my room I felt as if my head were going round and round. Was it my fault that Mademoiselle Paulina had thrown me a rouleau of money in the face, and had the day before preferred Mr. Astley to me? Some of the scattered banknotes were still lying about the floor, I picked them up. Just then the door opened and the head waiter himself (who had formerly not even deigned to look at me) appeared in the doorway to ask me if I would not like to move down a few floors to a splendid suite only just vacated by Count V.

I stood for a moment, lost in thought.

"My bill!" I cried. "I am going away, immediately—in ten minutes!"—"To Paris then," I said to myself, "it is evidently my fate."

A quarter of an hour later we all three found ourselves in a family compartment: myself, Mademoiselle Blanche and Madame Veuve Cominges. The sight of me made Mademoiselle Blanche go into fits of hysterical laughter. Veuve Cominges followed suit. I cannot say that I felt exactly gay. My life had been broken asunder, but since the day before I had become accustomed to stake all on a single card. Perhaps it was really true that the money had made me lose my head. *Peut-être, je ne demandais pas mieux*. It seemed to me that temporarily, only temporarily of course, a change had come over my life. "I shall be back in a month, and then . . . and then you and I will meet, Mr. Astley!" and yet, remembering it all now, it seems to me that even then I was very sad, although I laughed heartily with the silly little Blanche.

"What more do you want? How stupid you are! Oh, how stupid!" cried Blanche, breaking off in the middle of a laugh and beginning to abuse me in good earnest. "All right then, all right, we shall spend your two hundred thousand francs, but don't forget, *mais tu seras heureux, comme un petit roi*. I'll put on your tie for you with my own hands and introduce you to Hortense. And when we have spent all our money you will go back and break the bank again. What did those Jews say to you? The great thing is audacity, and you have it, and you'll bring me money to Paris again and again. *Quant à moi, je veux cinquante mille francs de rente et alors—*"

"And the General?" I asked.

"Oh, the General! As you know he always goes to buy a bouquet for me at this hour. This time I purposely ordered him to look for the most rare flowers. The poor

thing will come back and find the bird flown. He'll fly after us, you'll see! Ha, ha, ha! I shall be very glad. He'll come in handy in Paris. And Mr. Astley will pay for him here—"

And that is how it happened that I went to Paris.

CHAPTER XVI

What shall I say about Paris? The whole thing was, of course, delirium and folly. I only stayed a little over three weeks in Paris, by which time my hundred thousand francs were all spent. I speak only of one hundred thousand. The other hundred thousand I gave to Mademoiselle Blanche in hard cash—fifty thousand in Frankfort and a fifty-thousand bond three days later in Paris, which, by the way, a week later she made me cash. "*Et les cent mille francs qui nous restent, tu les mangeras avec moi, mon outchitel.*" She was never tired of calling me a teacher. It would be hard to imagine anything more calculating, miserly, and base than creatures such as Mademoiselle Blanche. But that is only as regards their own money. As for my hundred thousand francs she told me straight out, later on, that she needed them to settle herself in Paris for a beginning. "And now I have put myself on a respectable footing once and for all, and nobody will be able to lead me astray—I shall certainly not allow it," she added. As a matter of fact, I hardly saw those hundred thousand francs. It was she who had charge of the money from the first, and my purse, the contents of which she inspected every day, seldom contained more than a hundred francs—usually less.

"What do you need money for?" she would say with the most innocent air, and I did not argue with her. But she furnished her apartment most respectably with this money, and when she showed me over it, she said: "See

what can be done with the most miserable funds with economy and taste!" These miserable funds, however, came to precisely fifty thousand francs. With the other fifty thousand she set up a carriage and pair, and besides this, we gave two balls, or rather two evening parties, to which came Hortense, Lisette, and Cléopâtre—women remarkable in very many ways, and far from plain. At these two parties I was forced to play the most idiotic role of host, to greet and entertain excessively stupid nouveau-riche tradesmen, various young officers, incredibly ignorant and shameless military men, some wretched scribblers and newspaper hangers-on, who arrived in fashionable frock-coats and straw-coloured gloves and were complacent and swaggering to a degree which could not have been matched in Petersburg itself—and that is saying a great deal. They even tried to make fun of me, but I drank a lot of champagne and went to lie down in one of the back rooms. I found all this revolting to the last degree. "*C'est un outchitel,*" Mademoiselle Blanche said of me. "*Il a gagné deux cent mille francs* and but for me he would not have known how to spend them. And afterwards he will be a teacher again. Does anybody know of a place for him? Something must be done for him." I took to drinking champagne very often, for I felt very sad and profoundly bored almost all the time. I lived in the most bourgeois, the most mercantile atmosphere, where every sou was counted and weighed. Blanche took a dislike to me in the first fortnight, I could see that. True, she dressed me up to the nines and every day knotted my tie with her own hands, but in her heart she despised me sincerely. I took not the slightest notice of this. Listless and melancholy, I began going every day to the *Château des Fleurs* where regularly, every evening, I got drunk and learned to dance the can-can (which was abominably performed there) for which I acquired quite a reputation. In the end Blanche found me out. She had formed an

idea of me which led her to believe that for the whole time of our living together, I would follow her about with paper and pencil and reckon up how much she had spent, how much she had stolen, how much she would spend and steal in the future. And she was, of course, convinced that there would be a battle royal over every ten francs. For every expected attack on my part, she had prepared her defence in advance. And though no attacks came from me she adopted a defensive attitude in advance. Sometimes she would begin very heatedly, but, seeing that I said nothing and only fell back on the couch and lay motionless staring at the ceiling, she would express her amazement. At first she thought I was simply stupid, *un outchitel*, and merely stopped in the middle of an explanation, probably thinking to herself: "He's just stupid, why put things into his head, if he doesn't understand anything himself?" She would go out of the room, only to return in ten minutes (this would occur at the time of her wildest extravagances, extravagances far beyond our means: for example, she sold her horses and bought a new pair for sixteen thousand francs).

"Well, Bibi, so you're not cross with me?" she said, coming up to me.

"No-o-o-o! Do stop it!" I said, pushing her away with my hand, but this struck her as so curious that she immediately sat down beside me.

"You sec, I decided to pay so much simply because they are such a bargain. They can be sold again for twenty thousand francs."

"All right, all right—splendid horses! And now you have a wonderful carriage and pair. They'll come in handy and no more about it, please."

"So you're not cross?"

"What for? You do well to provide yourself with all these things. They'll come in handy later. I see you really do need to place yourself on a certain footing. Otherwise

you'll never amass a million. Our hundred thousand francs are just a beginning, a drop in the ocean."

Hearing such arguments from me, instead of the shouts and reproaches she had anticipated, Blanche was dumb-founded.

"So you . . . so that's the sort you are! *Mais tu as l'esprit pour comprendre! Sais-tu, mon garçon*, you may be a teacher but you should have been born a prince! So you don't mind our money going so quickly?"

"I wish it would go quicker still, damn it!"

"*Mais . . . sais-tu . . . mais dis donc*, are you rich, then? *Mais sais-tu*, you know you really despise money too much. *Qu'est ce que tu feras après, dis donc?*"

"*Après*, I'll go to Homburg and win another hundred thousand francs."

"*Oui, oui, c'est ça, c'est magnifique!* I know you will win and bring your winnings here. *Dis donc*, you'll be making me really fall in love with you soon. *Eh bien*, I will love you all the time if you go on like that, and I'll never once be unfaithful to you. You see, if I haven't loved you all this time, *parce que je croyais, que tu n'est qu'un outchitel (quelque chose comme un laquais, n'est-ce pas?)* still I have been faithful to you *parce que je suis bonne fille.*"

"None of your lies, now! And what about Albert, that little black-browed officer, didn't I see you last time?"

"*Oh, oh, mais tu es—*"

"Lies, lies! Do you think I'm angry? What do I care? *Il faut que jeunesse se passe.* You can't drive him away now, since he was there before me and you love him, but don't give him any money, d'you hear?"

"So you're not angry about that, either? *Mais tu es un vrai philosophe, sais-tu? Un vrai philosophe!*" she cried ecstatically. "*Eh bien, je t'aimerai, je t'aimerai—tu verras, tu seras content!*"

And in truth from that moment she actually seemed to have become really fond of me, even to have friendly feelings for me, and thus passed our last ten days together. The promised "stars" I did not see. But in certain ways she really did keep her word. Besides this she introduced me to Hortense, who was in her own way an extremely remarkable woman, and was known in our circle as *Thérèse philosophe*. . . .

But it's no use dwelling on all this. It might be used for a separate story, but there is no point in introducing "local colour" into this narrative. The fact is, I longed with all my heart for it to come to an end as soon as possible. But, as I have said, our hundred thousand francs lasted for almost a month—much to my astonishment. Blanche bought herself things for at least eighty thousand francs, and not more than twenty thousand francs went on our daily expenses, and nevertheless this sufficed. Blanche, who towards the end was almost frank with me (there were at least a few things about which she told me no lies), admitted that any debts she was forced to incur would not affect me. "I did not make you sign bills and bonds," she told me, "because I was sorry for you. Anyone else would certainly have done so and driven you to prison. You see how I love you, and how good-natured I am! That confounded wedding alone will cost me goodness knows what!"

We really did have a wedding. It took place at the very end of our month, and it is to be presumed that the last scrapings of my hundred thousand francs went on it. It rounded up our affair, that is to say, it rounded up our month, and then I retired formally.

It happened like this. A week after our installation in Paris, the General arrived. He went straight to Blanche and remained with us after almost the very first visit, though he did rent a little apartment somewhere or other. Blanche met him joyously, with squeals and giggles, and

actually rushed into his arms. In the end it was she who would not let him go, and he had to follow her about everywhere—on the boulevard, on drives, at the theatre, on calls. The General was still fit for such functions. He was dignified-looking, and perfectly respectable, fairly tall, with dyed whiskers and moustache (he had formerly served in the cuirassiers), his face distinguished, if somewhat puffy. His manners were perfect, his frock-coat fitted him beautifully. In Paris he took to wearing his orders. To stroll along the boulevard with such a man was not only perfectly correct, it was even, so to say, distinguished. The good-natured and foolish General was extremely well content with all this. He had by no means counted on it when he arrived in Paris. He had then turned up almost trembling with fear, thinking Blanche would shout at him and have him driven away. And therefore, seeing the turn affairs had taken, he was in ecstasy, and spent a whole month in a state of idiotic bliss. And that is the state I left him in. It was only here that I learned in detail what happened after our unexpected departure from Roulettenburg; the General had had some sort of a fit that very morning. He fell unconscious and for a whole week was almost out of his mind, babbling and raving. He received medical treatment, but suddenly abandoned everything, and got into the train for Paris. Blanche's reception was of course the best medicine for him. But traces of his illness remained for a long time, despite his joyful, ecstatic condition. He could no longer take part in arguments, or even maintain a conversation of the least seriousness. All he could do in such cases was to utter a "H'm" to every word spoken, and nod. He often laughed, but it was a nervous, unhealthy, rolling sort of laugh. At other times he would sit looking as dark as night for hours, his thick brows contracted in a frown. There were many things he could not remember at all. He had become impossibly absent-minded and fallen into

the habit of talking to himself. Blanche was the only person who could enliven him. Indeed, his gloomy, hazy fits, when he retired into a corner, meant nothing but that he had not seen Blanche for a long time, or that she had gone somewhere without him, or without taking any notice of him before leaving. When in this state he could not have said what it was he wanted, and hardly realized how sad and gloomy he was. After sitting thus for an hour or two (I noticed this once or twice when Blanche had gone away for the whole day, probably to Albert) he would suddenly start, looking round and fussing about as if remembering there was something he had to search for. But seeing nobody, and still unable to remember what it was he had wanted to ask, he would again fall into a state of obliviousness until Blanche suddenly arrived, gay, playful, dressed up, with her resounding laugh. She would run up to him, patting him, even sometimes kissing him, but not very often. Once the General was so glad to see her that he actually wept—I was quite astonished.

Blanche, the moment he appeared among us, began holding a brief for him against me. She became actually eloquent, reminding me that she had deceived the General for my sake, that she had been practically his betrothed, had given him her word. That for her sake he had abandoned his family, and that, finally, I had been in his employment and ought to feel that, and be ashamed of myself. I said nothing, but her tongue ran on and on. At last I burst out laughing and here the matter ended, by which I mean that she had begun by thinking me a fool and ended by considering me a very nice amenable fellow. In a word, I had the good fortune at last to earn the unqualified approval of this worthy maiden (Blanche was, after all, in reality a most good-humoured girl, in her own way, of course. I had not given her her due at first). "You are a clever, good-humoured person,"

she said to me, towards the end of my stay, "and ... and ... it's really a pity you're such a fool! You will never make your fortune—never!"

"*Un vrai Russe, un calmouk!*" she often sent me out for walks with the General, just as she would have sent a lackey to "walk" her leveret. I took him to the theatre, to the Bal Mobile, and to restaurants. Blanche gave me money for that, although the General had his own and was very fond of taking out his wallet in front of people. Once I almost had to use force to prevent him buying a seven-hundred-franc brooch which pleased him in the Palais Royale, and which he was bent on giving Blanche. For what was a seven-hundred-franc brooch to her? The General's whole capital amounted to no more than a thousand francs. I could never discover where it had come from. From Mr. Astley, I suppose, who had paid his hotel bill for him. As for the General's attitude to me all this time, I don't think he so much as dreamed of my relations with Blanche. Although he was vaguely aware that I had won a large sum of money, he no doubt supposed me to be a kind of domestic secretary to Blanche, or perhaps even her servant. However this may be, he always spoke to me as before—condescendingly, as behoved a superior addressing an inferior being, and even saw fit to scold me sometimes. He amused Blanche and myself exceedingly, one morning, during breakfast. He was not really a touchy man, but now he was suddenly offended with me, and what for I do not understand to this day. For that matter, I don't suppose he understood himself. He began speaking *à bâtons rompus*, shouting that I was a puppy, that he would teach me ... he would show me ... and so on and so forth. Nobody knew what it was all about. Blanche went into peals of laughter. At last we calmed him down and took him out for a walk. I often noticed, by the way, that he would grow mournful, as if regretting someone or something, as if he missed some-

one, even when Blanche was in the room. At such moments he tried once or twice to unburden himself to me, but could never quite manage it, his thoughts wandering to his army days, his late wife, his affairs, his estate. He would stumble upon some word which pleased him and would repeat it a hundred times in the course of the day, though it by no means expressed either his feelings or his thoughts. I tried to speak to him about his children, but he put me off with his former hasty exclamations, and changed the subject as soon as possible. "Yes, yes, the children, the children, you're quite right, the children!" Only once did he become sentimental, and that was when we went to the theatre. "Those unfortunate children!" he burst out abruptly. "Yes, sir, yes, those unfortunate children!" And that evening he repeated several times the words "unfortunate children." Once when I mentioned Paulina he flew into a regular fury. "That ungrateful woman!" he exclaimed. "She is wicked and ungrateful! She has disgraced the family! If there were any law here I would make her lick the dust!" As for de Grie he could not endure to have his name mentioned. "He ruined me!" he would exclaim. "He robbed me, he flayed me alive; he has been my nightmare for the last two years! I dreamed of him for months on end! That, that . . . oh, never speak to me of him!"

I saw that he and Blanche were coming to some sort of an agreement, but as usual said nothing. Blanche was the first to announce to me—it was exactly a week before we parted—"il a de la chance," she prattled, "Babouchka is now really ill and is sure to die. Mr. Astley sent a telegram. You will agree that he is after all her heir. And even if he isn't, he is in nobody's way. In the first place he has his pension and in the second place he can live in the side room and he will be perfectly happy. I shall be *Madame la Générale*, I shall go into good society" (this was Blanche's constant dream) "after which I shall be

a Russian landed proprietress, *j'aurai un château, des moujiks, et puis j'aurai toujours mon million.*"

"And supposing he starts being jealous, demanding ... God knows what, you understand me?"

"*Oh, non, non, non!* He wouldn't dare! I have taken measures, don't you worry. I have made him sign several bonds in the name of Albert. If he takes the slightest liberty, he'll be immediately punished. He wouldn't dare!"

"Go on, then, marry him...."

The wedding was celebrated without any particular display, a quiet family affair. Albert and a few other intimates were invited. Hortense, Cléopâtre, and the rest were sternly ignored. The bridegroom took the greatest interest in his position.

Blanche herself knotted his tie and pomaded his hair, and in his frock-coat and white waistcoat he looked *très comme il faut*.

"*Il est pourtant très comme il faut,*" Blanche declared, coming out of the General's room as if the idea that the General was *très comme il faut* had surprised even her. I took so little interest in the details, participating in it all in the capacity of an idle onlooker, that I have forgotten much of what happened. All I remember is that Blanche turned out to be not de Cominges at all, any more than her mother, whose real name was du Placet, was Veuve Cominges. Why they had both so far been de Cominges, I do not know. But this, too, seemed to please the General greatly, and he liked the name of du Placet still better than that of de Cominges. On the morning of the wedding he walked up and down the ball-room, fully dressed, repeating over and over again with an air of extraordinary gravity and importance: "Mademoiselle Blanche du Placet! Blanche du Placet! Du Placet! The spinster Blanche du Placet!" and a certain complacency irradiated his features. In the church, at the mayoralty, and at home, at the *hors d'oeuvres* table, he was not

merely joyous and contented, he was actually proud. Something seemed to have come over both of them. Blanche, too, bore herself with immense dignity.

"I shall now have to behave quite differently," she told me very seriously, "*mais vois-tu*, I quite forgot about one most unpleasant thing. Fancy, I still can't learn my new surname: Zagoryansky, Zagozyansky, Madame la Générale de-Sago—Sago, *ces diables des noms russes, enfin, Madame la Générale à quatorze consonnes! comme c'est agréable, n'est-ce pas?*"

At last we parted, and Blanche, that silly Blanche, actually wept when I said good-bye to her. "*Tu étais bon enfant*," she told me whimpering. "*Je te croyais bête et tu en avais l'air*, but it suits you." And after giving my hand a final pressure she suddenly exclaimed: "*Attends!*" dived into her boudoir and a minute later brought me two thousand-franc notes. That is a thing I would never have believed! "It'll come in handy, you may be a very learned *outchitel*, but you're an awfully silly man. I wouldn't give you more than two thousand for anything, for you'll lose it all just the same. Now, good-bye! *Nous serons toujours bons amis*, and if you win again, be sure to come to me, *et tu seras heureux!*"

I still had five hundred francs left of my own; as well as this I had a fine watch which cost a thousand francs, diamond cuff-links and so on, so that I could go on for a long time without worrying. I purposely went to live in this little town to have time to think things over, and, most important of all, I am expecting Mr. Astley. I have discovered quite for certain that he is to pass through here and stay one day and night, on business. I will learn all there is to learn, all . . . and then, then—straight for Homburg! I won't go to Roulettenburg, not before next year, anyhow. They say it's unlucky to tempt providence twice running at the same place, and real gambling goes on at Homburg.

CHAPTER XVII

It is a year and eight months since I looked into these notes, and now, from sheer wretchedness, in the hope of finding some distraction, I have picked them up again. They ended at my resolution to go to Homburg. Dear God, with how comparatively light a heart I wrote down those last lines! That is to say, not exactly with a light heart, but with what confidence, with what unshaken hopes! Did I ever for a moment harbour the slightest doubts of myself? And now, over a year and a half have passed, and I am, I think, much worse than a beggar! But what's a beggar? What do I care about poverty? I have simply wrecked my life! Why, there is no one for me to compare myself with, and no reason to lecture myself. What could be more ridiculous than lectures at such a time? Oh, smug ones! With what proud complacency these chatterboxes spout their maxims! If they only knew the extent to which I myself see the degradation of my present state, they would not have the heart to admonish me. What, I ask, what new thing could they tell me that I do not already know? And that is not the point, either. The point is that a single turn of the wheel can change everything, and these very moralists would be the first (I am convinced of that) to come to me with their friendly jokes and congratulations. People would not turn away from me then, as they now do. But to hell with them all! What am I now? Zero. What might I become tomorrow? Tomorrow I could rise from the dead and begin to live again. Tomorrow I could revive the soul within my bosom before it is quite dead.

I really did go to Homburg then, but . . . after that I went to Roulettenburg again, and then to Spa, I was in Baden-Baden, too, where I went as valet to Councillor Hintze, a scoundrel for whom I had once before worked. Yes, I was a valet for five whole months! This occurred

immediately after I left prison. (For I was in prison in Roulettenburg for debt. Some person unknown bought me out—who was it? Mr. Astley? Paulina? I don't know, but the debt was paid, two hundred thalers altogether, and I was free.) Where was I to go? Well, I went to that Hintze. He was young and frivolous and fond of his ease, and I can speak and write in three languages. At first he employed me as a kind of secretary, paying me thirty guildens a month; but I ended up by being simply his valet. He could no longer afford to keep a secretary, and he lowered my salary. I had nowhere to go, so I stayed, and gradually became his man-servant. I did not get enough to eat and drink in his service, but none the less I managed to save up seventy guildens in five months. One evening at Baden-Baden I told him I wished to leave him and that same evening I went to the roulette table. Oh, how my heart beat! It was not the money I valued—oh no! All I wanted at the time was for all those Hintzes and head waiters and fine ladies of Baden-Baden to be talking about me tomorrow, to be relating my story, wondering at me, praising me, and bowing down before my new winnings. All these were childish dreams and desires, but ... who knows, perhaps I would meet Paulina, be able to tell her, and she would see that I was above all these ridiculous ups and downs of fate. Oh, it is not money I care for! I am quite sure I would have squandered it again on some Blanche and once more driven about Paris for three weeks behind my own horses, at sixteen thousand francs the pair. I am quite certain I am not avaricious, I even consider myself a spend-thrift, and yet with what anxiety, with what a beating heart, I hear the cry of the croupier—*trente et un, rouge, impair et passe*, or: *quatre, noir, pari et manque!* How avidly I watch the gambling table on which are strewn louis d'ors, friedrichsdors, and thalers, the pillars of gold sliding from the croupiers' scoops into piles burn-

ing like fire, or the yard-long pillars of silver scattered over the wheel! While still two halls away from the gambling rooms, the moment I hear the chink of coins being poured out on the table, I am almost thrown into convulsions.

Oh, that evening when I took my seventy guldens to the gambling table was marvellous, too! I began by putting ten guldens on *passee* again. I have a superstitious feeling for *passee*. I lost. I had sixty guldens in silver left. After thinking, I chose zero. I started putting five guldens at a time on zero. The third time zero came round. I almost died of joy when I received a hundred and seventy-five guldens. I was not so happy the time I won a hundred thousand guldens. I immediately placed a hundred guldens on the red—red won; the whole two hundred on the red—red won. The whole four hundred on black, black won. The whole eight hundred on *manque*, *manque* won. I now had one thousand seven hundred guldens including the sum I began with and that in less than five minutes! Yes, such moments can make you forget all your former failures! After all, I gained this by risking more than my life! I dared to risk—and once again I belong to the ranks of human beings!

I took a room, locked myself up, and sat counting my money till nearly three in the morning. The next morning I woke up, no longer a lackey. I decided to go to Homburg that very day. There I had never been a lackey or been in prison. Half an hour before the train left I went to put down two stakes, no more, and lost a thousand five hundred florins. However, I went to Homburg just the same, and now I have been here a month. . . .

I live in perpetual anxiety of course, playing for tiny stakes and waiting for something to happen, making calculations, standing at the gambling table for days *watching* the play, even dreaming of play in the night, and yet all the time I feel as if I had turned to stone, as if

I were mouldering in slime. I come to this conclusion judging by the impression I seemed to have made on Mr. Astley. We had not met since then, and now met accidentally. This is how it was: I was walking about the park telling myself that, though I was now almost penniless, still I had fifty guildens, besides which, in the hotel where I had taken a tiny cell, I had paid up in full the day before yesterday. And so I had just enough for one more go at the roulette table, and if I won anything at all I could go on gambling. If I lost I should have to go into service again, unless I could find some Russians here who needed a tutor. Deep in these thoughts I pursued my daily walk through the park and through the woods to the neighbouring county. Sometimes I walked about like this for four hours on end, returning to Homburg tired and hungry. As soon as I emerged from the gardens into the park, I caught sight of Mr. Astley on a bench. He had seen me first and called me by my name. I sat down beside him. Observing a certain stiffness in him, I immediately moderated my raptures, though I had been intensely glad to see him.

"So you're here! I thought I should meet you," he said. "Don't trouble to tell me anything. I know all, all. The whole of your life this last year and eight months is known to me."

"Ha! So you keep a pretty close watch on your old friends!" I replied. "Your remembrance of them does you honour ... but wait a minute, you give me an idea ... was it not you who bought me out of the Roulettenburg prison where I was in for a debt of two hundred guildens? I was redeemed by some person unknown."

"Oh, no! I did not buy you out of the Roulettenburg prison where you were in for a debt of two hundred guildens, but I knew that you were in prison for a debt of two hundred guildens."

"Therefore you must know who it was who bought me out."

"Oh, no, I cannot say that I know who bought you out."

"That's funny. None of the Russians here knew anything about me, and I don't suppose they would buy me out, Russians only come to the aid of one another in Russia. And I was sure all the time it must have been some crank of an Englishman, who did it from sheer eccentricity."

Mr. Astley heard me out with some surprise. He had probably thought he would find me dejected and oppressed.

"At any rate I am very glad to see you maintaining all your spiritual independence, even your high spirits," he said, with a rather disagreeable air.

"By which you mean that you are inwardly furious to see that I am neither oppressed nor abased," I said laughing.

He did not at once understand, but when he did, he smiled.

"I've always liked your way of talking. I recognize in those words my former wise, enthusiastic, and at the same time cynical old friend. Only Russians can unite in themselves so many conflicting elements simultaneously. It is quite true that one likes to see one's best friend in a state of abasement. Most friendships are founded on abasement. This is an ancient truth, known to all wise men. But in the present instance I assure you I am sincerely glad that you are not dejected. Tell me, don't you intend to give up gambling?"

"To hell with it! I'd give it up this moment if only—"

"If only you could win back your losses? I thought as much. Don't go on—I know the words only escaped you by chance and are therefore the truth. Tell me, apart from gambling, don't you do anything?"

"Nothing."

He began to put me through my paces. I knew nothing,

I scarcely glanced at the newspapers and had not opened a single book all this time.

"You have fossilized," he said. "Not only have you rejected life, interests, both private and public, the duty of a citizen and a human being, your friends (and you had some, you know), not only have you rejected any aim whatever beyond winning, you have even rejected your own memories. I can remember you in an ardent and intense moment of your life. But I am sure you have forgotten all your best impressions of that time. Your dreams, your present, most actual desires do not go beyond *pair* and *impair*, *rouge*, *noir*, twelve middle numbers, and so on and so forth, I am sure!"

"That'll do, Mr. Astley, do not remind me, please do not!" I cried in vexation, almost in rage. "I would have you know I have not forgotten anything whatever. I have only driven it all out of my head temporarily, even my memories until—until I shall be able to improve my affairs radically. Then, then you will see me rise from the dead!"

"You will be here ten years hence," he said. "I am ready to bet that I shall remind you of all this, if I live, here on this very bench, ten years from now."

"That will do," I interrupted him impatiently. "And to prove to you that I am not so oblivious of the past, allow me to ask you—where is Miss Paulina now? If it was **not** you who bought me off, it was certainly she. I have never heard a word about her all this time."

"Oh, no, I don't think it was she who bought you off. She is in Switzerland just now and you will deeply oblige me by ceasing to ask me about Miss Paulina," he said firmly, almost angrily.

"That means that she has wounded you very deeply, too," I laughed with involuntary satisfaction.

"Miss Paulina is the best of all the worthiest beings in existence, but I repeat, you will deeply oblige me by ceas-

ing to ask me about Miss Paulina. You never knew her, and I consider her name on your lips an insult to my moral feelings."

"Indeed! But you're wrong, you know. And what else, I would ask you, is there for me to speak to you about? All our memories consist in this alone. But please do not be anxious, I have not the slightest need to know your inner, secret affairs. . . . I am only interested in the so-to-speak outward situation of Miss Paulina, or ly in her present outward circumstances. That may be told in a few words."

"Certainly, on condition that these few words are all. Miss Paulina was ill a very long time. She is ill now. For some time she lived with my mother and sister in the north of England. Six months ago her grandmother, you will remember that madwoman—died and left to her personally seven thousand pounds. Miss Paulina is travelling with the family of my sister, who is now married. Her little brother and sister are also provided for under the will of the grandmother, and are at school in London. The General, her stepfather, died of a stroke a month ago in Paris. Mademoiselle Blanche treated him well, but managed to get hold of all he received from the grandmother. . . . I think that's everything."

"And de Grie? Is he, too, travelling in Switzerland?"

"No, de Grie is not travelling in Switzerland, and I do not know where de Grie is. Moreover, once for all, I caution you to avoid such insinuations and insulting parallels. Otherwise, you will certainly have me to deal with."

"What—despite our former friendly relations?"

"Yes, despite our former friendly relations."

"A thousand apologies, Mr. Astley. But really, you know, there is nothing offensive and ignoble here. I do not blame Miss Paulina for anything whatever. And as for parallels regarding a Frenchman and a Russian young lady, Mr. Astley, the conjunction is one that is

much too complex for you and me to understand thoroughly."

"If you promise not to mention the name of de Grie in connection with another name, I would ask you to explain what you mean by the expression 'a Frenchman and a Russian young lady'? What sort of parallel do you call this? Why do you insist on there being a Frenchman and a Russian young lady?"

"You see, you, too, are interested. But that is a long story, Mr. Astley. A great deal must be known in advance. And yet it is an important question, absurd as it may seem at first glance. A Frenchman, Mr. Astley, is—a finished, exquisite mould. You, as a Britisher, may not agree. I as a Russian do not agree either, but that's probably from envy. But our young ladies may have quite a different opinion. You may find Racine affected, tortuous, perfumed, you probably would not even read him. I, too, find him affected, tortuous, and perfumed, and from a certain point of view even ridiculous. But he is exquisite, Mr. Astley, and, first and foremost, a great poet, whether you and I like it or not. The national mould of a Frenchman, I mean a Parisian, began to be merged in an exquisite form when we were still bears. The revolution inherited it from the nobility. Now the commonest little Frenchman may have manners, tricks, expressions and even ideas, of the most exquisite form, without his initiative, his heart, or his soul having any part in this form. It has all been handed down to him as a legacy. It goes without saying that he may be the hollowest, the basest of individuals. And now, Mr. Astley, I must inform you that there is no more frank and confiding creature in the world than a good, intelligent, not too affected young Russian lady. A de Grie, appearing in a certain role, appearing in disguise, can win her heart with extraordinary ease. He is the master of exquisite form, Mr. Astley, and the young lady takes this form for his soul, for the natu-

ral mould of his soul and heart, and not for garments handed down to him by inheritance. Unpleasant as it may be to you, I am bound to admit that Englishmen are for the greater part awkward and lacking in elegance, and Russians are very quick at recognizing elegance, and very partial to it. Now it takes incomparably more independence, of mind and freedom, than our women, especially our girls, possess, to recognize beauty of soul and originality of mind, and, of course, much more experience. Miss Paulina—forgive me, it slipped from me—needs a very, very long time to make up her mind to prefer you to that scoundrel de Grie. She may appreciate you, become your friend, open her whole heart to you, but that detestable scoundrel, that loathsome petty usurer de Grie will still reign in her heart. And this may be due to nothing but obstinacy and vanity, for de Grie once appeared to her in the aureole of an elegant marquis, a disillusioned liberal, who, he sought to persuade her, had lost his whole fortune in coming to the rescue of her family and the scatter-brained General. All these tricks have subsequently been exposed. But what does that matter? She still craves for the former de Grie—that's what she needs! And the more she detests the present de Grie, the more she will grieve for the former, though the former never existed except in her imagination. You are a sugar refiner, Mr. Astley, aren't you?"

"Yes, I am a member of the famous Lovel and Co. sugar refinery."

"Well, there you are, Mr. Astley. On the one hand a sugar refiner, on the other, the Apollo Belvedere. It just won't do, you know. And I'm not even a sugar refiner. I'm just a small-scale roulette gambler, I've even been a valet, and Miss Paulina no doubt knows this, for she evidently has a reliable police service."

"You are embittered, that's why you go in for all this nonsense," said Mr. Astley calmly, after a pause for re-

flection. "And there's not the least originality in what you say."

"Granted. But that's just what makes it so terrible, my noble friend—however stale, vulgar, farcical my trump card may be, it is nevertheless a truth. After all, you and I have gained nothing."

"It is vile nonsense . . . because . . . because . . . let me tell you then," said Mr. Astley, his voice trembling and his eyes gleaming, "let me tell you, ungrateful and unworthy, petty and unfortunate man, that I came to Hom-burg at her request, purposely to see you, to have a long, intimate talk with you, and to tell her all about you—your feelings, thoughts, hopes, and . . . memories."

"Did you really—really?" I cried and my tears flowed copiously. I could not restrain them and I think it was the first time such a thing happened to me.

"Yes, unhappy man, she loved you, and I can tell you this because you are a ruined man. Even if I tell you that she still loves you, I am sure you would still stay here. Yes, you have ruined your life. You have certain abilities, a lively mind, you used to be not such a bad chap. You might even have been useful to your native land, which is in such dire need of people, but you remain here and your life is over. I am not blaming you. As far as I can judge, all Russians are like that, or inclined to be. If it were not roulette, it would be something else of the same sort. There are very few exceptions. You are not the first to fail to understand the meaning of work. (I am not now speaking of your peasants.) Roulette is a game chiefly favoured by Russians. Up till now you have been honest, preferring to be a lackey rather than steal . . . but it appals me to think of what may happen in the future. Enough, good-bye! You need money, of course? Here are ten louis d'ors from me, I will not give you any more because you will gamble it away, anyhow. Take it, and now good-bye. Take it!"

"No, Mr. Astley, after all that has been said—"

"Take it!" he shouted. "I feel sure you still have some fine feelings left, and I offer you the money as I would to a true friend. If I could be sure that you would give up gambling and Homburg and go back to your native land, I would immediately give you a thousand pounds for a new start in life. But I do not give you a thousand pounds, I give you only ten louis d'ors, precisely because at the present moment a thousand pounds or ten louis d'ors are the same thing to you. You will lose them anyhow. Take them and—good-bye."

"I will take them if you allow me to embrace you in farewell."

"Oh, that—with pleasure!"

We embraced heartily and Mr. Astley went away.

No, he is wrong! If I was harsh and foolish in what I said of Paulina and de Grie, he was harsh and hasty in his conclusions about Russians. I say nothing of myself, and yet . . . and yet . . . all this means nothing at the moment. It is all words, words, words, and what is needed is deeds. Switzerland is the great thing now! Tomorrow, oh, if I could leave tomorrow and go there! To be revived once more, to be born again. I must show them. . . . Let Paulina see that I can still be a man. The only thing is needed . . . it's probably too late today, but tomorrow . . . oh, I have a presentiment, and it cannot be otherwise! I now have fifteen louis d'ors, and there have been times when I began with as little as fifteen guildens. If I begin very carefully . . . surely, surely I'm not such a child! Surely I can see that I am a ruined man! But—why should I not come back to life? Yes! All I have to do is for once in my life to be cautious and patient—that is all that is needed! I only need for once to be firm, and in a single hour I can change my whole destiny. The great thing is character. I need only remember what happened to me seven months ago in Roulettenburg, before the final fiasco.

Oh, that was a remarkable instance of firmness! I had lost everything, everything . . . I was going out of the casino when I suddenly felt in my waistcoat pocket—something moved—I still had one gulden left. “So I shall be able to get myself a dinner,” I thought, but, after walking on a hundred paces or so, I thought better of it and turned back. I put that gulden on *manque* (it was *manque* that time) and, truly there is something extraordinary in the sensation of being alone in a foreign country, far from one’s native land and friends, and not knowing what one will eat that day, staking one’s last gulden, the very, very last. I won, and twenty minutes later went out of the Kursaal with a hundred and seventy guldens in my pocket. That is a fact, sir! See what the last gulden can sometimes mean! And supposing I had lost heart then, had not ventured....

Tomorrow, tomorrow, we shall see.

